

THE RIVETER

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STRAPHANGERS



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MY PROFITABLE
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BROADCASTING: THE TOWERS ON SELFRIDGE'S ROOF

STRAPHANGERS

BY
ARNOLD PALMER

With Illustrations



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PREFACE

ORIGINALLY, this book was to have been of a different nature.

I had been re-reading the volume, twenty years old, in which William Archer recorded Real Conversations with prominent men of that day, when I was tempted by the idea of repeating, as well as I could for my generation, what he had done so very well for his. I made out a list, several lists, of eminent people who still preserved an air of secrecy and mystery, of interesting people whose bloom had not yet evaporated beneath the warm breath of interviewers. The Dramatic Censor was one, I remember ; the Wittiest Woman in London was another ; and then there was—"well, I forget the rest." But what with my obscurity and the brilliance of the selected ladies and gentlemen, the interviews were a long time starting. So many of the old 'uns, too, were on the Riviera and so many of the young 'uns were bound for New York or Los Angeles that I soon realised that I had either to give up my life to the task or abandon it.

But the collecting fever was on me. If all the masterpieces had left our shores, there were yet cigarette cards. From this point it was a short and easy step to the discovery that I actually preferred the cheaper article. (Humbler,

rather. Nothing could be cheaper than celebrities.) London, I informed myself, is full of men and women so romantic, so wildly exotic, as to tastes and professions that we think of them, if we think of them at all, as unknowable, never expecting to meet them, never dreaming that we could resemble them or that their children grow up, like other children, to follow naturally, and without any sense of overwhelming adventure, their faint paths.

The riveter, the mannequin, the pilot, the detective. . . . Of course I kept warning myself, before I met them, that they would be perfectly ordinary people. But I didn't altogether believe it ; never quite believed it, indeed, until the day when I observed that many of these odd fish considered me the oddest fish of all. When I understood this—when I understood, that is to say, that the searchlight in each of us is apt to throw out theatrical beams, soft and tinted, on to the newcomer—I added a chapter on myself, or rather on the interviewer. For I am like the rest in that my interest, if I possess any, depends largely on the habits, training, prejudices, and limitations imposed on me by my profession. A man who could write things which someone else was willing to print and pay for, I appeared magical to my new friends. I may seem so even to you, O slippery reader. Comfort yourself, in that case, with my wonder at that quality in you which has carried you already as far as page 2.

It is to the ordinariness, the very modest,

helpful, nice ordinariness of my followers of strange callings that the title of this book alludes. If the people you meet in these pages were all put into one 'bus, the conductor would certainly congratulate himself on having so normal a complement, and on his escape, for one journey at least, from the usual eccentric bore. They are, indeed, men and women with whom, like marine vegetation, you gently sway in 'buses and tubes, morning and evening. I hope you will like them—if not in the rush hours, then at least in your own armchair. I am prejudiced, I know, in their favour. So often they showed me that, however dangerous and dashing their lives, nothing had ever thrilled them like me and my pencil.

Most of these crayon portraits have already appeared (trimmed sometimes to fit the frame and with the trimmings now restored) in *The Sphere*, and I am glad to have the chance of thanking the editor of that periodical not only for the use of the blocks but also for many suggestions and much patience. The usual acknowledgments? Not at all. You must consider him as very nearly author of the book, only he didn't write any of it. . . . "The Sky-writer" and "Saffron Hill," not hitherto published, are here added—the first for its own brave sake, the second for the sake of completeness.

STRAPHANGERS

CHAPTER I

THE RIVETER

THEY were strangely familiar, those piles of cylinders, girders, wires, bars, pipes, rods and rails, that sea of mud, those heaps of twisted, rusted, indefinite iron, looking like the remains of bedsteads recovered from a burned hotel, all lying in the shadow of a gaunt and gaping château. They made up, between them, a close imitation of an R.E. dump behind the lines. But this skeleton building was in process of construction, not decay ; and it was 125 ft. high—as tall as three châteaux.

I picked my way through the orderly confusion of surplus stores sufficient to run up a street of ordinary houses, and passed through a wall. I had now entered the building. I had a ceiling of great girders which cut the sky, but my ceiling was five stories high or more. This was a Piranese room, where the roof is another kind of firmament, with walls rising like cliffs, and tiny men perched high, high up in inaccessible eyries, where they had their strange homes and lived their remote, unguessable lives. I found myself thinking of them as people who had been born

up there and never came down, and spoke a native language. They couldn't be men who used Tubes and sat in trams, and were interested in the result of the 2.45 at Haydock Park. They couldn't be Englishmen.

* * * *

My guide and guardian touched my arm, and feeling like an infant Dante I followed him over planks laid across pools of cement and up and down an uneasy-looking ladder or so. Nobody laughed. I concluded I must be doing pretty well. It didn't occur to me till later that nobody troubled to look at a man engaged on a foolproof job, a job near the earth. The first few floors are not considered interesting.

Interesting, I mean, from the point of view of possible mishap. I was shown a tractor-like machine used for drilling, which is to the drills which break up a road surface as they are to a dentist's drill. Its removal, and the removal of other plant, from the basement or cellars is one of the contractor's minor problems.

We climbed several more ladders. Everybody had warned me about vertigo, and I peeped out nervously. I was rather disappointed to find we had just reached street level. But my disappointment vanished immediately when I was asked if I would like to meet a riveter.

"One of those men," I cried, "who walk about on spidery iron beams, so high that one can't bear to look at them? Yes, but——"

I wondered what kind of man he would be. I imagined him a proud man, even a fierce man. I think that, from some confused connection of thought, I expected him to be rather like an eagle. And I found myself looking into a pair of kind, gentle, tired eyes, and shaking hands with a boy of twenty-two. (Actually, I discovered, he was a few years older.) Moreover, there was something about him which I recognised.

" You're a Londoner! " I exclaimed.

There was no particular reason, of course, why he shouldn't be, but the versatility of Londoners never fails to excite me.

Yes, he was a Londoner. He worked up aloft —had been in this branch of the business, in one capacity or the other, since he was fourteen. He talked about those narrow girders hung in space as a clerk talks of his office—a place to work at.

" But don't they sway? "

" Oh, yes, in a wind. A windy day's bad," he said. " The gusts catch you, you see. You want to look out for them."

" And the rain? "

" The rain makes it a bit slippery," he admitted. " Especially if your boots are bad."

He paused. I said nothing. The little picture he had drawn was too vivid for me to be able to think of anything to say.

" Of course," he went on, almost apologetically, " you've got your tools and things with you, and

they're pretty heavy. . . . Would you like to come up?"

"Awfully! But remember, I'm not a mountaineer. Lead on!"

* * * *

More ladders. When we weren't mounting ladders, he was walking, and I was nervously shuffling, across planks and rafters in order to reach other ladders. I notice that, like almost all brave men, he was careful and considerate, taking no unnecessary risks himself and going out of his way to adjust anything which might be a pitfall for the next comer. We went on climbing. Sometimes a cross-beam would pass so close to a ladder that there was only just room to squeeze beneath it. The ladders rested on planks which in turn spanned a deepening drop down into the cellars, where the shadows were growing blacker and the lights smaller and sharper. The ladders, unlike a staircase, did not always accommodate themselves to the actual stories of the building. Where one ended, a wooden platform was erected to meet it, and to support the next ladder. Thus it was difficult to guess how high we were.

We seemed to be getting fairly high, and I seemed to be doing wonderfully well, when we came to a ladder which, instead of sloping forwards, was perpendicular, held in support by thin ropes, lashing it—at intervals—to supports. The riveter led, I followed. But I took a dislike

to that ladder. I knew it was perpendicular, but as we rose it seemed to tuck its tail in beneath us, as if it were doing its best to slope outwards.

"How high are we now?" I asked, on reaching the platform at the top.

"Fourth floor."

"Why, that's only half-way!"

"About half-way to the top of the framework. Then, of course, there are the cranes above that."

"Oh, of course," I said. Even to me my voice sounded rather flat.

* * * *

I drew a deep breath, and had a look at London. A rainy mist hid most of it, but I saw a comfortable dun-coloured house, with a jolly garden plot, which I recognised with an effort as Buckingham Palace. To the left the roofs of Piccadilly streamed away, glistening, converging.

There was a sudden squall of wind, and the rain began to fall in earnest. The riveter cocked his eye at the heavens. Where had I seen a man lift his head in just that professional way?

"It's blowing up rough," he said, and his words, or perhaps the sound of the wind in the rigging, gave me the clue.

"Are there any sailors on this job?"

"Lots of us are sailors. . . . Well, now, would you like to go up?"

"Up!" I faltered. I had already been looking

at the ladder. It was upright, like the last one, and rose sheer beside us.

"Look!"

I followed the direction of his finger, up the ladder, up more ladders, up the naked, towering girders, up to one of the derricks lodged, like a rook's nest in winter, on the bare top, and again up the mast of the derrick, tapering and stretching away into the sky. Half-way up the mast a movement caught my eye, and I saw a man, the size of a fly, crawling up towards the pulley. I shuddered violently, looked down quickly at the toy traffic playing at the bottom of the cliff, and wrenched my eyes up again and stared straight in front of me straight into the distance, into the merciful, dimensionless mist where there was nothing. Gradually, gradually, the earth steadied itself, the ladders and girders stopped whirling in the sky and sank back into position, the little platform where we stood ceased to pitch and rode peacefully into harbour. I looked round for the riveter. He was already shinning up that beastly perpendicular ladder. I grabbed him by the trouser.

"I'm very sorry," I said, with a sickly smile.
"I'm really terribly ashamed. But——"

He came sliding down immediately, with a face full of concern.

"That's all right. Nothing to be ashamed of," he said gently, consolingly.

* * * *

Of course it was true, in a way. I tried to

comfort myself with the reflection that possibly he would shudder violently at the prospect of writing for the newspapers. But it wasn't much good. No doubt, if he had been arrogant or contemptuous, I should have felt myself as good a man as he. But I could see nothing in his face but sympathy and a suggestion (of extraordinary delicacy) that he was reproaching himself for want of consideration.

" You wouldn't be able to see much to-day, anyhow," he observed.

" I know that. It's not that which is— Oh, well, never mind. Tell me how far you can see on a clear day."

" From the top? You can see beyond the Palace."

I suppose I was still a little dizzy. His Majesty and Joe Coyne rattled together in my empty head. I pulled myself together. "The Crystal Palace?" I suggested.

" Yes. Then, of course, you can see them changing guard in the Palace grounds."

" Buckingham Palace?"

" Yes."

We could have seen that even from where we were, even in the mist then prevailing. I saw that he wasn't very interested in views. Probably he was sick of them. I didn't press him, and he pointed, with returning animation, to a crane leaning out high over Piccadilly Circus, and explained the difference between a crane—"a Scotchman," he called it—and a derrick. He

seemed to like talking about them, and every word he spoke revealed his professional pride. The phenomenal steadiness of his own head moved him not at all. The excellence of the derricks overhead filled him, on the other hand, with satisfaction.

We began the journey down, and I achieved a minor success by stepping on to a board which someone had left insecurely lodged across a fifty-foot drop. I should never have known of the danger if I had not heard the sudden hiss of the riveter's breath. I had actually managed to frighten him! But on my account, not on his own.

We reached earth without further excitement, walked across a space which will shortly be a paved thoroughfare joining Berkeley Street and Stratton Street, but is now like a cavalry training camp after a week's rain, and mounted to the first-floor of the rear block of flats. These, which overlook Lansdown Passage, are nearing completion. They have floors and doorways and definite rooms. After the ladders and planks of the other building they seemed remarkably safe, and even, to my surprise, dull. My attention would keep wandering from the spacious reception-rooms and entrance halls, the best bedrooms and bathrooms adjoining; and presently I walked to a doorway which opened on to space in order to get a better view of some workmen carving slices of London clay from a deep hole beneath.

Whizz!

A dozen pails on a board dropped past my face, and as I reeled backwards somebody remarked dreamily, "Mind the lift."

* * * *

I left the riveter standing on the ground, looking up at the high girders with the wistful expression he turned to all the world. I wondered if he were sorry that the job was nearly finished, but it seemed a silly question, and it remained unuttered. There is no answer to a question of that kind. Besides, with his miraculous gift of balance and surefootedness, he was still a mystery to me. And not the least mysterious part of him was that he could descend and mingle with his fellow men and never show by word or glance that he had been born an eagle. Just one in a crowd, all the other members of which may be equally marvellous to his neighbour. Such is London.

CHAPTER II

THE THEATRE ELECTRICIAN

TUCKED away in the O.P. corner of the Coliseum's vast stage, a little group is waiting for the overture to end. Above our heads runs the lighting gallery ; beside us rises a board displaying a telephone exchange and a dozen or more signal bulbs and switches ; near us are a timber balk ("Exit tempestuously. A moment later, the street door slams "), an electric bell ("telephone " or " visitor "), a thin metal sheet ("thunderstorm "), and various other aids to the imagination. A clown in a nightmare costume presses a finger gently against the edge of the great curtain and takes a peep at the audience. He turns round, but his face is expressionless in its mask of white. Nobody can guess whether he is pleased or not.

"Pretty good!" he remarks, in a tone of satisfaction. He has the right to express an opinion, that clown. For though he may top the bill at Colchester or Newark, he is the first turn here. He will be lucky if, by the end of the week, he isn't an authority on the linings of cloaks and overcoats.

I watch him as he takes a deep breath and plunges from gloom into dazzling light. Then I

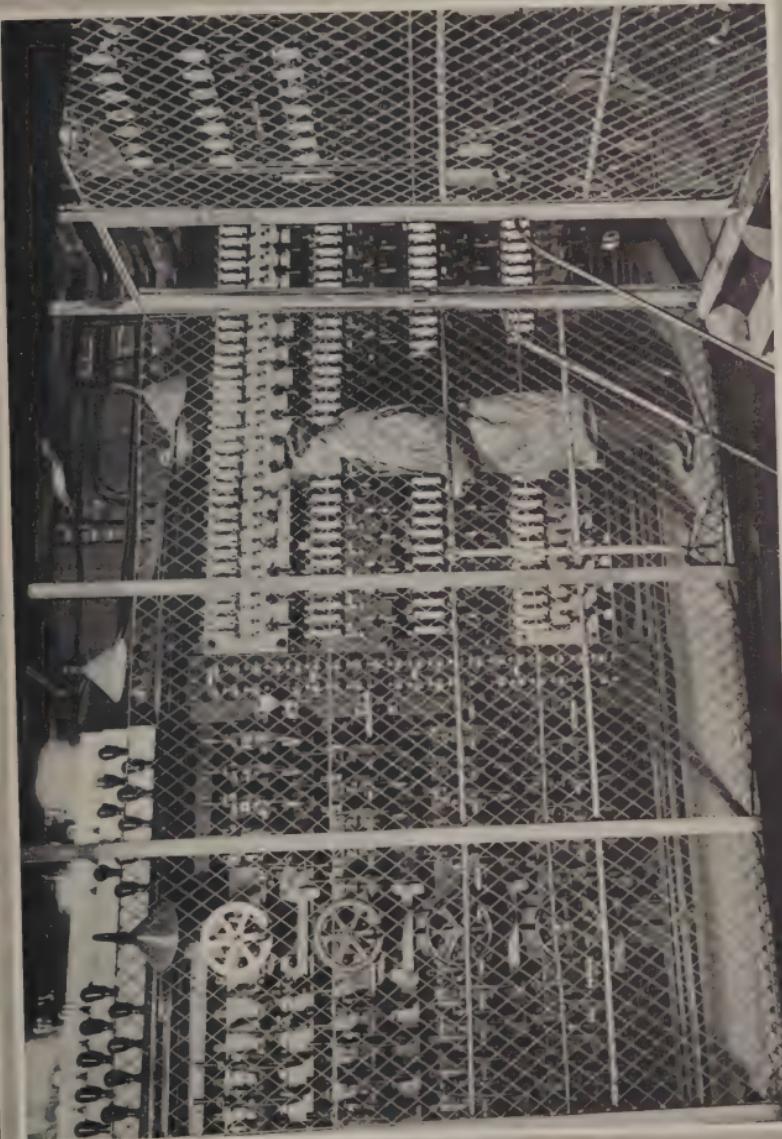
turn and mount a companion-way to where a solitary young man patrols the lighting gallery. He might be a ship's captain on the bridge, or he might be a signalman. Along the walls are handles, levers, wheels, knobs, pulleys, and switches—hundreds and hundreds of them, for from here can be controlled practically every light in the building—auditorium as well as stage. The young man is doing nothing much at the moment, for the clown demands a simple "full up" from first to last. The stage, or as much of it as is used for his turn, is "flooded." Possibly the explanation leaves you little or no wiser. In that case, we will walk to the end of the gallery, where, through a square opening, we can see something, though not all, of the stage and how it is lit.

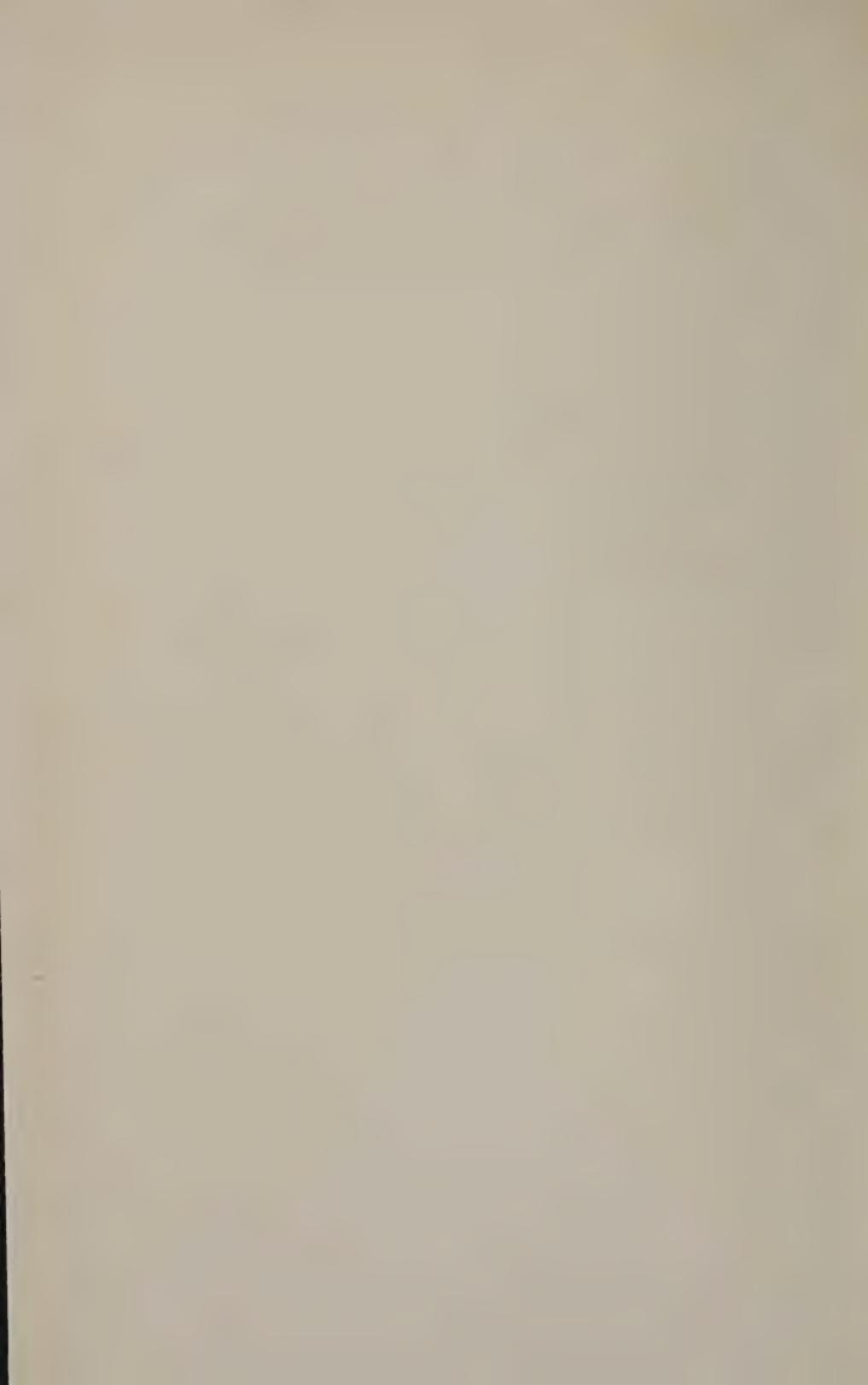
* * * *

Along the top of the scene, just high enough to be out of sight of the occupants of the stalls, runs a line of electric lights—red bulbs, blue bulbs, white bulbs. These lights are known as the "battens," and the place where they hang, amid rolled-up gauzes and back-cloths, is called the "flies." There are nine parallel rows ("lengths") of battens, the back lengths being used only when the entire stage is needed. (Perhaps you saw the Rodeo; perhaps you saw the lawn-tennis professionals; perhaps, on the other hand, you have been to the Coliseum many times, and never yet seen the whole stage in use.) There are some 200 bulbs in each of

the nine lengths, and they are backed by sheets of iron painted white, which serve to throw the light downwards. The footlights, or "floats," resemble any one length of battens—there are the red, the white, and the blue bulbs. At either end of the floats—we can see only one end from our window in the lighting gallery—is a radiator-like affair, hidden among the artificial flowers, and known as a flower-box. Each of these contains three 1,000 candle-power globes, which can be turned at will from white to other colours. All the lights so far mentioned are fixtures, and when they are fully on—the flower-boxes, the floats, and as many lengths of battens as the depth of the scene demands—the young man in the lighting gallery has given a "full up." He can give no more. But there are many other lights assisting to "flood" the stage. There are movable standard lamps, with powerful reflectors throwing their rays from the wings. There are limelight men up above the gallery working what are known as projector lights. All these, and any other imaginable odd light installed at any other imaginable odd angle, are controlled also by the young man in the lighting gallery, in the sense that he can turn them off, but he does not manipulate them. His immediate concern is the battens, the floats, and the flower-boxes; in between times he rotates the stage. The first turn ends, and very still in my corner, I watch the young man flying about his gallery.

THE LIGHTING GALLERY





Another "full up," and two cross-talk comedians stroll on from opposite wings. The lighting is almost the same as for the first turn, but not quite. These *artistes* have their own back-cloth, and use a smaller stage than the clown. Two lengths of battens suffice; the limelight men in the roof focus instead of flooding, or in other words project a spot of light on to each performer instead of diffusing it all over the scene. I notice another thing. Out in front, above the orchestra, are eight hanging lights, disguised on the auditorium side as heraldic devices. This extra length of battens, or these raised floats—I don't know which to call them—are a novelty, I learn, having been tried for the first time a month or so ago. They have been very successful in helping to flood the stage and to mitigate the upward glare of the footlights.

* * * *

A roar of laughter breaks in on my consciousness, and I remember with a start the back-chat *duo*. Lord, they're still at it, and evidently have just let off a particularly good one. Being busily engaged with the Higher Lighting, and not having heard a word of their dialogue, we, like Queen Victoria, are not amused. The two comedians, with little gestures, grimaces, and shufflings, endeavour to feign hesitancy while really waiting for the laughter to subside. I can see their thoughtful eyes calculating just how long the applause can be left unstimulated, just how

soon the next line can be made audible. Technique, even a little scrap of technique like that, is always extraordinarily interesting. Here I am in a world of technique—eloquence, mechanical, musical, atmospheric. I seem to be looking at an anatomical chart of Art. Wonderful! I see how everything works. Everything. The soul? Oh, that's not shown. But it's there, you know. It's knocking about somewhere. At least, perhaps it is.

* * * *

When I descended the companion-way my eye fell on the dwarfed figure of a woman standing on the other side of the stage. Nobody could have told whether she was someone's weary old dresser or the loveliest girl in London. That is how big the stage is. A few minutes later I found myself in the neighbourhood of this uncertain female; I remembered my doubts, and looked at her. She was one of the most famous and elegant actresses in London. At the moment, however, she was walking up and down with knit brows; and realising that she came on next or next but one, I hurriedly sheered off. I wandered about, rather timidly—the place was so full of technique—and on my second tour of the stage I found, in a corner, a stable containing horses and grooms! I might never have noticed it if I hadn't been drawn thither by the sight of a jockey standing on his head. I was wondering at his secret joy and why he had to manifest it

thus when he suddenly came right side up, looked at me gravely, and walked away. More technique, I suppose.

Impromptu rehearsals are not the only things one has to dodge. There are the cables emerging through "dips" (or trap-doors in the floor), and supplying current to the movable brackets and standards used for projecting light of various hues from the wings, as well as for making those amusing wriggly patterns which hide the revolving stage and the busy scene-shifters as effectively as a curtain. I was examining one of these standards, puzzled that it should be wasting current by throwing a fierce red light at nothing in particular, when a wooden frame in the side of the scene suddenly opened, and I was startled to see a man's face, rouged and unnatural, two yards from my own. He looked straight at me.

"What a heavenly evening," he yelled; "look at the sunset, my darling, on the hills."

I heard a woman's voice complaining fretfully, and then, before I had time to imitate a hill, the wooden frame slammed to, and I was alone with the standard lamp.

Not really alone, of course. There are never less than two dozen people working behind the scenes; sometimes there must have been fifty. They come and go, while one or the other cries, "Quiet, there!" As I turned away, I nearly fell over two tiny newcomers—a sturdy little man, grotesquely arrayed, and a pretty girl made up to

look hideous. Eccentric dancers, I guessed. The little man was doing arm exercises, when a burst of applause announced that the playlet had come to an end.

"Now!" said the little man. But he had forgotten the curtain calls. More applause. It dies away, and like a fire begins to crackle again.

"Oh, my God!" he moans, in a voice of helpless, desperate impatience. The next instant he steps quickly aside as the star, leading her partner by the hand, comes through the wings on her way to the dressing-rooms. The orchestra strikes up. The stage groans and rumbles. The young man in the lighting gallery runs up and down. The curtain-man, with his hand raised, cocks an inquiring eye in our direction. Ready? Now for it. Come on, kid!

Shouting excitedly, like children compelled to give vent to their exuberant spirits, they go cartwheeling on to the stage. They might be mills, rotated by light. The little man starts slowly, and spins faster and faster. His partner begins rapidly, and gradually decreases her pace until she is stationary, upside down, her face redder than all its rouge. Her ungainly plaid kilt slips to her armpits, uncovering a pair of shiny, tight, green satin knickers.

Two stage hands, moving a settee, take a moment's rest, and watch the performance with serious, troubled eyes.

"There's a slight suggestion of vulgarity about this turn," remarks one of them, uncomfortably.

" Not quite in keeping. Not quite what we're
_____ "

" I've noticed it myself," agrees the other.

* * * *

Right up on the roof, hard against the cupola, is a trap-door leading to a cabin. Here are the limelight men, wedged in behind enormous lights. Pinned up in front of their eyes a simple score, like a drummer's or a triangle man's, tells them when to flood, when to focus, when to rest. Only one of the lights is working now. It focusses on a minute figure, the size of a fly, cringing in a lit circle on the darkened stage. A voice, faint, distant, clear as a sheep's bell on a mountain, floats up to us :

" . . . very 'umble, Mr. Copperfield. . . . And my father, he was 'umble too, sir. . . . And now he's a partaker of glory, though only in a very 'umble way."

Scattered between the roof and the cellar, numerous doors, unobtrusive and locked, hide little colonies of electrical plant, each the size of a railway engine. Much of this is duplicate plant, for in order to lessen the risk of failing current, the entire house is connected with two separate stations. By the time I return to the stage my respect for the young man in the lighting gallery is even greater than before. He tells me that he expects to be really busy in a minute or two, and seems glad that I am to see the best of which he is capable. So far, I

gather, the programme hasn't given him a proper chance. But there is a ballet coming on next. Not the Russian ballet. Something, from his point of view, far subtler. The Russians keep him busy, but they go in for effects which he considers crude.

"Well, even their scenery's crude, isn't it?" he adds.

So much for Marie Laurencin!

I watched the ballet from the front, from the last row of the stalls, just beneath the box containing the projector. When I say I watched the ballet, I exaggerate. I heard the orchestra playing Ravel; I saw a figure silhouetted against a glowing back-cloth; and my attention wandered off to that glow. Ah, yes, the dips . . . and now the light is coming up through the glass panes in the floor . . . beautiful, beautiful . . . there's a high-power light up in the battens, focussed on to a recumbent figure . . . blue in the flower-boxes . . . and great work, oh, great work, by the projector man sizzling just above my head. . . . What a touch! What an artist! . . .

It is a fascinating game, and I grew wildly excited over it. Unfortunately, it ruins the show. There is a crash of applause, the curtains rush together, the floats go up, the curtains part. I expect to see a parade of electricians, and there appears—what do you think? A row of dancers! All very pretty and graceful, no doubt, and the lady in the centre is world-famous. But don't

they realise, can't the public see, that they're merely a vehicle whereby the lighting staff express themselves? Apparently not. I slip from my seat into the street, feeling old, out of place, dejected. How can I ever enter a theatre again?

ROMEO: It was the lark, the herald of the morn.

*(Just a touch of amber. Knock out that blue a trifle.
Not too much! It's not the breakfast gong, old man,
merely the lark.)*

JULIET: O, now be gone; more light and light it grows.

(Full up. Flood.)

No, it will be unbearable. I've seen too much.

CHAPTER III

THE SKY-WRITER

IN the Hendon Aerodrome, a draughty, wind-swept expanse which seems, like all aerodromes and harbours, to have been selected for the special purpose of discouraging the landsman ; where your side of the ground is always fringed with Crystal Palaces and the other side with mole-hills ; you will find in a corner a little wooden office, labelled *Sky-writing*, and towering above it a hangar which clangs and rattles in an endless, unaccountable attempt to exaggerate the climate. This office and this hangar house a business which is the only one of its kind in the world—the business of writing advertisements in the sky. It is the invention and property of an Englishman, Major John Clifford Savage, who, after twelve years of experimental work, in 1922 succeeded in using the sky as a slate for the first time. The place chosen for the introductory display was Epsom Downs, the day Derby Day, and in telling you that Captain Cuttle won the race I am telling you something the sky-writers themselves don't know, even yet. They had a big gamble that day—a lot of money, twelve years' income, a bet out of all proportion to any other bet booked in the

enclosures. But it wasn't on "The Captain," at ten to one, nor even on St. Louis, favourite at fours ; and the fact that Steve was completing the second part of his great hat-trick afforded them no thrill, because they never even noticed it.

* * * *

The result of this first effort was a contract with *The Daily Mail*. Now, nearly five years later, it is betraying no secret to say that the contract was welcome. Twelve years of purely experimental work means constant expense without compensating returns. Encouraged, but not satisfied, Major Savage, with two machines, two pilots, and a few mechanics, sailed for New York late that year in search of a new continent and a new climate. The story of the American trip is connected almost entirely with the commercial side of the business ; but it is a story which must surely afford so much gratification to every Englishman that I propose to tell it. For all the sky-writing in the world is and always has been done by British pilots in British machines. They have worked, for various manufacturers, in the air of France, Holland, Belgium, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Cuba, and Canada, as well as the States. In all these countries, and in others, the invention is protected by fully a hundred patents ; but it is to the credit of the Long Island bootleggers that, by attaching to their motor-cars an apparatus capable of

emitting a smoke screen between them and their pursuers, they have shown that the principle of the invention may be profitably employed in "everyday" life.

* * * *

The little party reached New York late in 1922 and succeeded in settling in without attracting undue attention. In a few days' time, when the conditions were suitable, a machine ascended during the lunch hour and wrote, straight above the Wall Street district, "Hello, U.S.A." The sensation was profound, the results negligible. Everyone talked of it, but nobody knew what to make of it. Throughout the following morning Captain Turner (who had made the Derby Day ascent, and was thus the first to sign the sky in both hemispheres) waited beside his machine while his companions, with alternate caresses and bludgeonings, wooed the shy Inspiration. The idea, when it came, sent the machine rising, again at luncheon time, and spelling out, "Call Van 7100." This is the number of the Vanderbilt Hotel, where the other two Englishmen were waiting in their room. Presently their telephone rang. Someone wanted to know why he should call that number. Half an hour was spent in answering someones as fast as possible, and then there was a knock at the door. A lady entered. She explained that she was in charge of the hotel telephonic room. She seemed worried—in fact, she said she was. She



SKY-WRITING

said, too, that the entire sixty lines at her disposal were blocked by people ringing up in response to Captain Turner's invitation ; that no other guest in the hotel could give or receive a message ; and that all the bulbs on her board were blazing so fiercely that unless the apparatus blew up beneath the strain, her operators would lose their eyesight. Probably they'd lose it either way. She couldn't say. She wasn't an optician. She was hired to look after the hotel telephone, and—

* * * *

The position was explained and, with a little trouble the lady pacified. But about ten minutes later the calls ceased, as if by magic. Major Savage went down to investigate, and found that the manager had instructed the operators to deal with the inevitable "What's it all about ?" by replying, "Vanderbilt Hotel. Dinner dance in the Della Robbia room every Thursday. Three dollars a head. Book your table!"

It was a good move. Evidently there is some life in the old States yet. And the manager must be a good fellow, too, for he cancelled his instructions. It takes a good fellow to renounce a brain-wave like that.

Among the inquirers was the American Tobacco Company, perhaps the largest tobacco combine in the world. Major Savage was asked to call and explain his scheme. He did so, and (feeling, I imagine, that life had become a film)

met the President of the company. The President suggested "a small experimental contract," three or four hundred displays in the course of four months, and inquired the price. Obviously, some kind of figure had to be quoted. But what? Say . . . well, say half a million dollars.

It was said.

The usual argument followed, or was following, when the President brought the interview to a conclusion by offering 350,000 dollars for 350 displays all over the States.

"And," he added, rising, "bring me your answer at ten o'clock to-morrow. If it's no, I never want to see you again. Good-day."

The three Englishmen sat up all night, doing sums. There were dollars to be turned into pounds. There was the cost of bringing another dozen machines and another half-a-dozen pilots with mechanics and spare parts, from England. There was the strange climate, with the unknown risks of delayed or spoiled displays. . . . Morning found the sums still unsolved, but the answer was yes.

* * * *

The campaign dealt with one article only, Lucky Strike cigarettes—not the ideal combination of letters from the sky-writer's point of view—and its duration coincided with a remarkable increase in the sale of these cigarettes. Of the 350 displays ordered, only twenty had been completed when the American Tobacco Company,

uncertain whether the gratifying increase in trade was the result or merely the chance concomitant of sky-writing, arranged for twenty-five displays over Los Angeles and a similar number over Philadelphia. These two cities were chosen deliberately as tests, Los Angeles because the sales were already so good that improvement was considered unlikely, Philadelphia because it was famed for its powers of resistance to all known forms of advertising. In one month the sales in these cities increased 39 per cent. and 60 per cent. respectively. At the conclusion of the further 1,100 displays which were subsequently requisitioned (making a total of 250,000 miles flown in 1923 for this contract alone), the consumption of Lucky Strike cigarettes had risen from 24 millions to 32 millions a day, and the rate of progress increased five-fold.

* * * *

The writing of words in the sky is not, as flying jobs go, a dangerous one, for the reason that it can be usefully attempted only in a calm, clear atmosphere. Those who dislike the English climate will be encouraged to learn that in this country a sky message, on the stillest summer day, will not be legible for more than ten minutes after completion, whereas on a good day in America the letters will remain, stationary and clear, for an hour.

The work is carried out at an altitude of 9-12,000 ft., but even at this height the air, in the Western

Hemisphere, is practically motionless on a good day—or, if not motionless, at least steady. Steadiness is everything. In a steady gale a message, though becoming elongated, will be more enduring than in a gentle yet puffy breeze.

The machines employed are single-seater fighting machines—"high altitude fighting scouts," to be precise—fitted with a cylinder (i.e. the inkpot, containing in liquid form the material for writing) and two large asbestos-covered pipes, like a racing car's exhaust, down which the "ink" travels on its way to the air and conversion into smoke. The flow of "ink" is regulated by a knob in front of the pilot, and presents no difficulty. The difficulty lies in knowing and controlling the precise line of flight. Many of the spelling manœuvres are actually fighting manœuvres; and as all letters have to be made backwards and are illegible to the writer, his success depends on the precision of his calculations and his skill in carrying them out. If he were to make a mistake, he might realise it, but he would not see it. In any event, I am not clear as to what steps he could take to erase a letter half a mile or more across.

* * * *

To accustom himself to the formation, in reverse shape, of hidden letters by means of manipulating a mechanical vehicle, the novice practices on an ordinary bicycle with a kettleful of whitening, such as is used to mark out tennis

courts, tied on behind. The letter presenting most difficulty to the sky-writer is the small b, and the second most difficult is the small c. No analogy, here, to the problems of infancy. But when the aviator is sufficiently advanced in his new caligraphy to practise the actual writing in the sky, certain resemblances between him and an infant are discernible. His early writing is very slow and large, the letters frequently measuring a mile or more. Speed and smallness are the signs of the heavenly artist ; he flies at 80-120 m.p.h., and his letters (capitals excepted) are never more than half a mile across.

Moreover, as he is required, in the fulfilling of the firm's contracts, to write the same words over and over again, he gains in facility as the weeks or months go by, and so adds considerably to the length of life of the completed message. For instance, even a highly proficient writer like Captain Lingham found himself able to reduce gradually from twelve to four minutes the time required to ginger up heaven on the question of its morning newspaper, and thus to add about seven minutes to the life of the completed display.

* * * *

And yet there are times when sky-writing, with all its advertising virtues—its sensationalism, its irresistible attraction, the brevity and huge dimensions of its announcement—may by those very same virtues embarrass the aviator. One day

last summer, when a large and fashionable gathering was assembled for a fête at the Country Club, a sky-writer ascended to waft his message to North London in general, and in particular to the distinguished throng beneath him. Never mind what he was going to write. It doesn't matter, and anyhow, he never wrote it. He reached some 10,000 ft., and made the first letter, beautifully. While he was making his second letter he noticed that the smoke was issuing unevenly. During the third letter the fault, in spite of his steps to correct it, grew worse, and half-way through the fourth letter he decided to return to earth and investigate. He landed, and saw his colleagues pouring from office and hangar, and pointing upwards as they hastened in his direction. All the guests at the Country Club seemed to be pointing upwards, too, except those who were huddling ladies into the building. He looked upwards himself, and there, white, fleecy, motionless, and, to his agonised eyes, the size of Europe, floated perfect in every detail, a common, low, vulgar, in fact, a very rude word indeed.

CHAPTER IV

THE MINERS OF LONDON

THE news that the C. and S.L. tube is being extended from Clapham to Morden is certain to leave you, unless you happen to live in the district, stone cold. Even if you live in the district, you have long ceased to speculate about the pit-heads which rise, gaunt and ugly, like entrances to coal mines, but without the coal, every few hundred yards along the route. After all, something is always going on in London. Somebody is always digging a hole, or filling a hole, or being busy behind a hoarding which pushes you off the pavement. . . .

At the corner of Trevelyan Road, amid the tin huts and wooden shanties, the cranes, the buckets, and the mud, there is a little hole 50 ft. deep, three ladders deep, which acts as Entrance Hall, Booking Office, Lift, and Moving Stairway. It is very muddy at the top, and as I followed the engineer down the slimy ladders I got muddier and muddier. Then, down at the bottom, the mud really begins. This is the blue London clay, found hardly anywhere else in the world, and affording, with its softness and stickiness, the perfect medium for tube construction. In its ordinary state it is a slaty-blue, and has the

consistency of a fresh chocolate caramel. It dries hard, and of a bluey-mauve colour often streaked with red, and very beautiful. Before we had taken many steps I noticed two other things about that clay. First, that it would suck my shoes off my feet if I wasn't careful ; and secondly, that it was bubbling with what appeared to be soda-water.

" Why does the floor bubble ? " I asked.

" Compressed air. This," said the engineer, pointing to what appeared to be a large baker's oven blocking our passage, " is the compressed-air chamber."

" Oh, yes. But why—"

" Have you got a cold ? "

" No, thank you. Why—"

" Is your heart all right ? "

" Yes. Why—"

" Because you may find a 12 lb. compression unpleasant at first. Hold your nose, and blow your cheeks out till your ears pop. Then yawn, and make them pop again. Then swallow, then blow and yawn again. Keep on making them pop."

* * * *

I looked more closely at the baker's oven. I felt myself beginning to take a faint dislike to it. A very loud hissing noise was sounding, and through a small glass panel in the oven door I could see a thick, white fog. The hissing died, the door opened, and four or five men groped their way out.

"Now," said somebody, and I plunged into the fog. The door banged, and the hissing, twice as loud as before, started again. I held my nose, blew out my cheeks, yawned, swallowed, blew, and my ears kept popping like crackers. The fog vanished, and I saw that there were two other men with me in the chamber. One was blowing, the other was yawning. At the moment I was swallowing, which seemed only fair. I remember making a mental note of our comic appearance—something to do with the 12 lb. look—and then the hissing grew louder than ever, and my head seemed to swell, to be on the point of bursting, to be absolutely certain to burst, to be bursting. I swallowed, and gained a second's respite ; yawned, and gained another. Still the hissing continued, the pressure grew. I experienced a searing, scorching pain above the left eye. Just when I had decided that it was unbearable, the hissing died, the further door swung open, and we stepped out into a dim corridor whose end was lost in mist.

"All right ? "

"Oh, yes. But you forgot to ask me if I'd ever had neuralgia," I grumbled.

The next instant I was regretting my weakness, for the pain began to disappear now that we were out of the chamber. We were in the circular tunnel, lined with the familiar iron rings, such as can be seen from any Underground platform. The floor was still mud. We lurched along in a dim, yellow murk, and every now and then a

man pushing a truckful of clay would loom up out of the mist, heading for the compression chamber. Everything, as well as everybody, must necessarily pass through the chamber, as boats on a river must pass through a lock, for the air in the tunnel has to be kept at a 12 lb. pressure. Only thus can the face of the tunnel be prevented from falling in and, even more important, can water be restrained from flooding the work.

* * * *

We slipped and slid and groped down the long tunnel for two or three hundred yards. Ahead of us was a thudding noise ; soon I heard voices also ; and at last I saw opaque forms moving in the illuminated mist. We were approaching what is known technically as "the shield"—the tip of the tunnel, the vanguard of the tunnellers.

Lights were more plentiful here. The shield is an iron hoop (very slightly larger than the iron rings which are the ultimate lining of the tunnel), pushed forward into the clay by pistons, whose near ends press against the last of the iron rings. The pistons are driven by a machine which translates the air pressure into hydraulic pressure, and produces the thudding noise already mentioned. It is an important machine, perhaps a wonderful one, but when I saw it, it had been there for months, and was just a heap of mud troubled with a hacking cough. Every time it coughed, the shield moved—imperceptibly, save



THE MINERS OF LONDON: AT THE SHIELD

for the falling clay. When the piston-rods are fully extended, the machine is shut off, the pistons pushed forward and home, and another iron ring pressed into position. That means another twenty inches of tunnel.

The men in the shield are London's miners, a select, almost a family band. Several of them told me of fathers and uncles who had been in the business before them. "And," they often added, "they don't forget it! They're always trying to teach us what they think we don't know."

* * * *

Their position is a peculiar one. They receive, as well as earn, good wages, and as there are barely enough of them to go round, they are seldom or never out of work. They have therefore an independent outlook, and belong to no union. All this I found interesting, but the next piece of information was impressive, and even awe-inspiring. They hinted that they rather despised coal-miners! In exceptionally busy times coal-miners are drafted in, and they have been, on the whole, a failure. They haven't, it seems, the right touch for London clay. Even in the tunnelling companies, during the war, the coal-miners hadn't always—

"All the same," I murmured, "to despise a coal-miner!" I whistled softly, with compressed air.

These London miners work in shifts of, roughly, eight hours, or, more exactly, two rings.

The work is not really dangerous unless the air compression fails. But it is carried on in conditions which are necessarily gloomy and depressing, and may be worse. Only a little time before, the air compression in the next tunnel, the one with which they will presently effect a junction, had been slightly increased, with the result that they had worked for a week up to their knees in water.

" Didn't you send word ? "

The leader shook his head. " By the time a message got to the top, and the other people had been consulted, and approval given, our shift would have finished. Of course," he added, musingly, " there was always another shift following us. . . . But then there had been one before us, too. No, nobody sent round word."

" Since," I asked, " the compressed air ordinarily keeps the water out of the tunnels, and the tunnels keep drawing nearer and nearer to one another, where does the water go to ? "

" I can tell you where some of it went to," he answered. " We struck a disused well the other day. It was beneath a house, and our compressed air rushed into the shaft of the well, blew the water up through the floor of the house, and lifted an old lady across the room. She was very good about it."

* * * *

We slid back down the long, sticky tunnel. An empty truck, having shot its load of clay into

the world, was occupying the compression chamber when we reached it. When the gauge showed 12 lb. the hissing ceased, the door could be opened, the truck could return to the shield, and we could take its place in the oven. More blowing, yawning, and swallowing, because, although the air pressure was now being reduced to normal, in the confined space of the chamber the effect is almost the same as when pressure is being raised. Further, as the air expands, it cools, and turns rapidly to an icy, choking fog, so thick that even the electric bulb a few inches from my face was little more than a whitening of the fog.

Up the ladders, and a quarter of a mile of wonderful world where the air is always "free," and the sky overhead, where pubs light up and girls go by, and 'buses rumble past like jocular monsters; and then down another shaft to visit the Tooting Broadway Station. Once more the baker's oven awaits us. I am warned that the pressure here will be 15 lb., and I nod contemptuously, and peep through the inspection window at the dense white fog. Presently the door opens, and men and fog tumble out together. Now it is our turn, and I prove for the third time that these compression chambers are 5 ft. 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. high, or just half an inch shorter than I am. More blowing, etc., more popping of ears. As the pressure rises the fog disappears as if by magic, and discloses other yawners and swallowers. The hissing goes on rather longer this

time, presumably in order to secure the 3 lb. additional pressure, and my left eyebrow again starts aching madly. I put my mouth to a miner's ear and yell, "Do you ever get a headache? Doesn't anybody ever get a headache?" But he only smiles tolerantly and shakes his head. He may mean a negative, but I think he is merely implying that he can't hear me.

* * * *

We stepped out into the huge vault of the station. This should be airy, if only with compressed air. But from a cause not discovered, it is extremely warm. Comparative idlers like the inspecting engineer and the foreman, even a complete idler like myself, perspired gently. The miners, who here wore trousers only, poured and shone with sweat. Some of them, lying on their backs, were engaged on hacking out the escalator shaft. This is the worst job of any. The clay drops on the miner as he dislodges it; he has very little room in which to work, and the hottest and stalest air to breathe.

Every time a miner swings his pick, he grunts. Even the gentlest tap is accompanied by a heartfelt grunt, as meaningless, as inevitable, as peculiar as an ostler's hiss.

I asked to see the tunnel which was to join up with the shield workers I had met at Trevelyan Road. Here, at the Tooting Broadway end, the shield was no longer in use, but from the furthest point of its progress a narrow, shallow gallery

had been pushed forward, like a bull's-eye projected from the centre of a target. If there is any variation in the direction of the two tunnels, this will be discovered when the Trevelyan Road party strike the gallery, and the Broadway end of the tunnel will be adjusted accordingly.

"Supposing they miss the gallery?"

The engineer looked at me. "I don't think they'll do that. We've already joined up with two other parties. In one case the error was $\frac{1}{4}$ in., in the other $\frac{1}{8}$ in. No, I don't think they'll miss the gallery."

He led the way back to the station. Men were gathered in little groups, seated on trucks, or on the still shapeless platform. In that dim, fantastic vault, where nude bodies gleamed and writhed, 50 ft. down, in the tight, foggy air, where trucks banged and clattered in the dark, narrow passages, where men and machinery tore savagely at the fleshy earth, tea-time had come and, with it, tea.

CHAPTER V

THE DISTRICT SIGNALMAN

IN all his daily routine, I don't suppose the Londoner is as ignorant of any feature as of the underground trains. His meals, his clothes, the 'buses, and the newspapers—he is interested in and understands something of them all. The electric trains he simply accepts. He may travel in a steam train less than half a dozen times a year ; yet he will have a clearer idea of the working of the L.N.E.R. or the L.M.S. than of how he gets, day after day, from Baron's Court to Mark Lane. Perhaps the explanation is that our subterranean services, in spite of their unusually decorative posters, haven't yet caught the fancy of literary gents. Authors—dear old things!—still place their diamond thieves and their distressed heroines in the Scotch express or the Blue Train. I am thinking of changing all this in my forthcoming romance, *The Prisoner of Down Street*.

* * * *

There is a reason, no doubt, why authors stick to steam. Automatic signals present a certain bleakness as well as a certain intricacy. Yet even on a system like the District, where points

or switches occur, there are signal-boxes unsurpassed for wonder and romance.

One of these stands on a bridge stretching over the line a hundred yards east of Earl's Court Station. The room, a long one, is full of curious contrivances ; but there is a feature so much more striking than all the rest, so unavoidably noticeable, that it compels you to look at it first. This is a rectangular coloured plan of the track lying immediately east and west of the bridge. It is painted on glass, and lit electrically from behind, so that it glows evenly all over. There are four sets of rails at this point—two up and two down—and switches, or curved pieces of line, whereby trains may be diverted from one line to another. All these are clearly shown on the diagram, and, in addition, each set of rails is divided into sections, labelled consecutively A, B, C, and so on. These divisions are not arbitrary. The actual track on which the trains run is similarly divided into sections, separated and insulated from one another by fibrous packing. Each of these sections corresponds to one of the lettered divisions on the glass, and is connected with it by wires. While a train is on, say, Section A, it extinguishes its local light behind the diagram, and Section A there appears in shadow. As soon as the first pair of wheels reach Section B, another light dies ; Section B falls into shadow and turns black. Should the train be half on A and half on B, or should nineteen-twentieths of the train be on one

section and only a pair of wheels on the other, A and B sections will both be in shadow on the diagram. A will not be re-illuminated until that section of the track is completely bare.

* * * *

The signalman, then, with his levers in front of him, stands facing the plan. He can tell at a glance what sections of the track are occupied. The shaded portions tell him that—and something more. They tell him that as long as section H, for example, is black, he cannot pass any other train on to that section even if he wished to, because the lever is locked. I repeat that, as long as one pair of wheels remains on section H, it cannot be shown as clear either by the green light of the automatic signal or by the arm of the signal post. The levers controlling the points are similarly locked, and share the same quality of mutual exclusiveness. As the train moves, the shadow moves—you can watch it sliding along, a reflection of what is passing below. And as the shadow moves, lever after lever loses or regains its freedom.

We might, without undue omission of detail, tabulate the process thus :

The train controls the picture.
The picture controls the levers.
The levers control the signals (and points).
The signals control the trains.
The trains control the picture.
And so on for ever. A virtuous circle.

"Yes," you may say, "but there is a signalman. As long as the human element is present, there is the possibility of error." Let us suppose that the signalman faints or goes off his head. He cannot run one train into the rear of another, or switch it on to an occupied section of line, because those particular levers are locked and immovable. The most he could do would be to omit to work the free levers. The signals would all remain adverse. The block would grow, and eventually (assuming that no one else was in the box, and that the rest of the staff and management had also lost their reason) the entire system would be brought to a standstill. But there would be no collisions. There would be a failure, in a sense, of the signalling devices, but it would be a failure in the direction of safety, not in the direction of danger.

"Yes, yes," you interrupt. I knew, from your popping eyes and congested expression, that you were going to interrupt. "But supposing the driver of the train, by malice or misadventure, ignores the signal!"

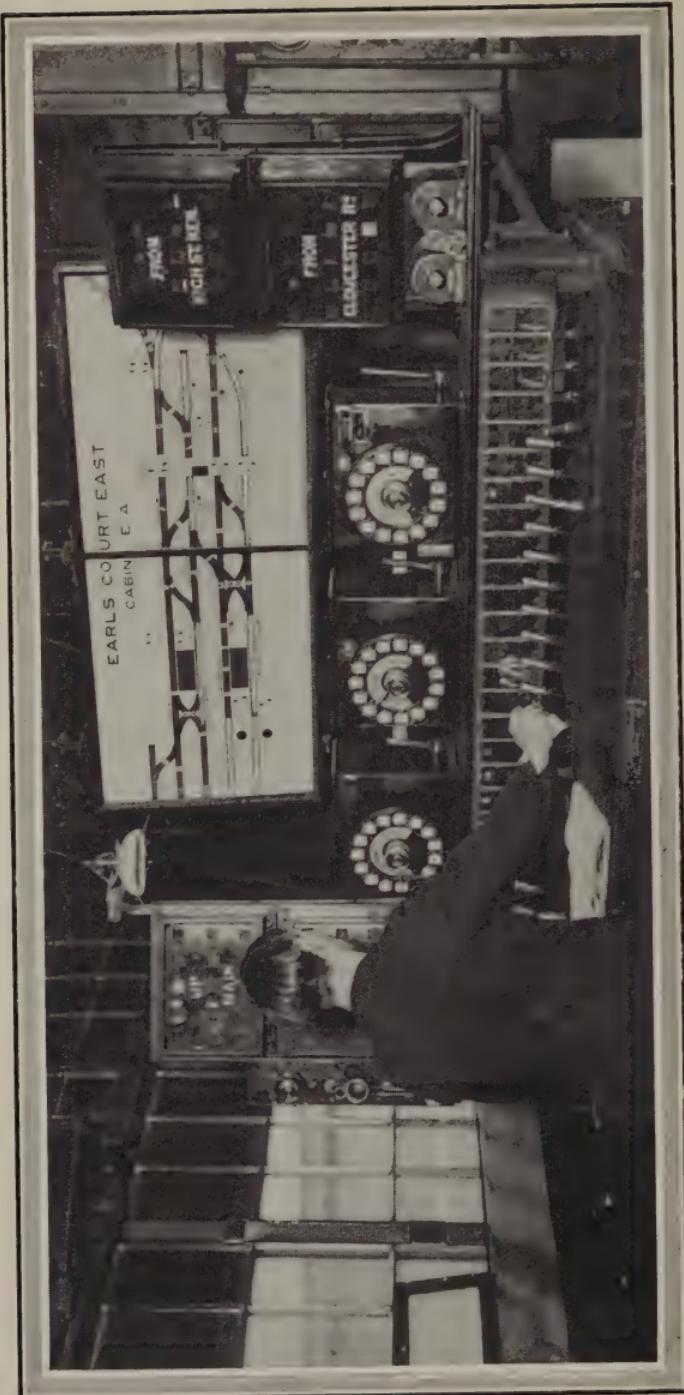
With all your doubts and difficulties, you make me feel like Mr. Drage—or Duggie.

Your supposition has been faced and the danger met by a contrivance known as the "train-stop." This consists of a movable arm, or tripcock, fitted into the ground beside the rail. When the signal is down, the tripcock is down. When the signal is up, the tripcock is up; and should the signal be disregarded, the

tripcock engages a projecting tap on the right-hand side of the engine and automatically applies the brakes. The train cannot then proceed until the driver (or another) has descended on to the track, closed the tap, and released the brakes. Further, this precaution is in its turn checked, any slight displacement of the tap, even though insufficient to cause it to miss the tripcock, being automatically registered during the run.

* * * *

All this time the trains have been rumbling and clanking and sizzling beneath the bridge, defying the company's warnings and setting a deplorable example to the public by spitting, with Continental *abandon*, a stream of blue sparks as they go. All this time, too, the signalman has been pushing and pulling his baby levers, checking the passage of trains in his time-table, telephoning to the next box, and attending to one or two other machines which I will describe presently. He never rests for an instant, and although he is relieved, thanks to the safety devices, of much of the dread responsibility of a signalman at a big provincial junction, yet he has a fuller and more easily dislocated service to deal with. The slightest delay on a system like that of the District Railway has a cumulative as well as an immediate effect, piling up trouble and congestion not only along the length of the District, but along the length of the Metropolitan and other systems which work



THE DISTRICT SIGNALMAN

in with it and share its road. These systems may have, in their turn, other systems working in with them. It is difficult to increase the facilities of the service without increasing its sensitiveness. Since there are in the course of every hour some eighty trains to be speeded on their way without hitch or hesitation, you will not be surprised to hear that, towards the end of his eight-hour spell, the signalman looked a very tired man.

At either end of the levers stands a square metal box, and some smaller boxes are ranged behind the levers. The larger ones, to right and left, contain little openings, and into these openings there are constantly popping white, rectangular pieces marked with various designs, like mah-jong tiles or dominoes. These indicators are worked from the neighbouring signal-boxes, and identify approaching trains. The dominoes will, of course, almost invariably agree with the time-table lying in front of the signalman. But not always. In the event of breakdown or fog, or for any reason which seems sufficient to the Traffic Controller, one train may be given sudden preference over another.

The smaller boxes in front of him enable the signalman, in his turn, to keep his neighbours informed. They differ from the larger boxes in that they possess a dial, formed by the dominoes arranged in a circle, and a movable hand. A Mansion House train passes eastwards ; the signalman moves the hand round to the domino

bearing Mansion House arrangement of dots, and a similar domino will pop up beside the signalman in the next box. A Hounslow train naturally requires the information to be passed westwards.

Meanwhile, a solid-looking machine in the corner of the room, a heavily studded cylinder which might be part of a giant's musical box, is quietly collecting this news for purposes of its own. The process just described—all this game with the dominoes—is recorded here, the various symbolic combinations being marked by the depression of one or more of the studs. The sequence of the trains is stored up in this machine, and passed on to—what? Have you guessed? To the indicator on the platform, that lit square which tells you that, though you are just too late, another chance will be given shortly to you and such as you.

* * * *

I left the signal-box with the secret conviction that most of the other jobs on the District Railway were sinecures. I didn't see how they could be anything else. Men were needed to drive the trains, no doubt. A few station officials were desirable. But even though I knew that between South Kensington and the Mansion House there were no signal-boxes, the single each way track being controlled by automatic signals only, I couldn't see what there was for anyone to do. Away from the points and

switches, the trains seemed to run themselves. Perhaps my guide guessed what was in my mind, for he led me without a word back to the station and into the office of the Traffic Controller to have my illusions dispelled. This office never closes, for it is the receptacle of all reports connected with the train service. The Traffic Controller is the man who, in the event of unpunctuality, alters the sequence of trains ; in the event of rain, increases their size ; in the event of a hold-up, arranges with other lines and 'buses and trams to come to the assistance of the passengers. To keep the service going, to avoid congestion, to lessen the cumulative effect of delay—these are his main and constant pre-occupations. Typically enough, he was, when I entered, being informed by telephone that a train had just left Whitechapel two minutes behind time. He was not unduly distressed, for the hour was 6.30 p.m., when the service is strained to the uttermost and local irregularities will occur. But as soon as such irregularities show signs of becoming a habit, he worries very considerably. At Victoria, for instance, there is apt to be a loss of ten to fifteen seconds, owing to the heavy traffic. To counteract this, the track sections (the strips of rail insulated between two fibre-packed divisions) have been shortened, the automatic signals guarding each section brought nearer to one another, and a general closing up of the traffic made possible at this point. A train entering or leaving the station can thus be

kept moving a little longer ; it means the avoidance, in a fair proportion of cases, of a definite halt, the few seconds' delay which, running back like a ripple over the system, spreads into minutes as it goes.

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For five evenings in the week the Earl's Court Station takes on beauty between the hours of six and seven. I was fresh from a very different kind of beauty—the beauty of mechanical precision—and though it is not one which, as a rule, strikes an answering note in me, I felt a moment's impatience with the unheeding crowd. The moment passed. I don't want the myriad parts of London's intricate pattern to thread themselves too consciously. They are more wonderful as they are—unknowing, casual. Along the platforms and up the stairways, mounting, mounting, mounting to their heavens, pale-pink stockings piped to the muffled beat of gents' striped trouserings. The loan of Doris's black satin, a mouthful with Mum, and ready at eight for Harry and the Palais de Danse. An armchair and a cigar and a peaceful evening with the missus. A little music at Mrs. Campbell's. Dining with the Williamsons, and the chances of that girl being there again. Some work to do. . . . Of what are they all thinking ? Of anything and everything but the silly old train which brought them. Brought them ? Well naturally.

CHAPTER VI

THE BIRD-KEEPER IN THE PARK

IN all parts of London one finds the meeting-places of bird-lovers and birds. Men and women and cooing pigeons foregather at St. Paul's, daily on the Embankment the gulls scream greetings to their human friends, and daily the quacking ducks waddle beside their hosts and hostesses along the shores of the Serpentine. In churchyards and in squares, wherever there are grass and quiet and a sparrow or two, you will find old men and children, young girls and old maids, offering to their quarrelsome, ill-mannered little friends the crumbs left over from their lunch packets or the cubes of bread brought specially from home. Who are they, these faithful providers? Do they follow the birds, or do the birds follow them? I don't know. I don't know who they are. I don't believe anyone knows or can classify them. They vary so. Some look like country folk imprisoned in London, or Londoners who have longed always, but in vain, to live in the country. Some have quite a professional touch, and can do anything with the birds. Others are amateurs and will remain so, being too shy for friendship, even for the friendship of a robin. They would be happy

for a year if a bird were to perch on their finger. But no bird does, or ever will ; and they are grateful if the gorged little creature so much as notices their crumbs.

If there is a headquarters for this brotherhood, if there is a club, it is surely at the east end of the lake in St. James's Park. Here, in addition to sparrows, gulls, and pigeons, there are of course many birds foreign to London, foreign to England. These strangers are fed officially, and so are not on the usual intimate terms with the brotherhood. Yet the members come. There are the pigeons, the sparrows, and the gulls. Each member has, all to himself, a paper bag, a black, public bench, and a little flock of birds. He must know his fellow members by sight, of course, but he never greets them, never even nods. This is the one characteristic they share, by which they may be classified. Rich or poor, old or young, male or female, urban or rural, they are lone folk. Don't be too ready with your pity. Very likely they are happiest so.

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On the paths at their feet and on the grass beside the foot-rail the gulls and pigeons take their unequal shares of the repast. Even here Nature seems to be losing her battle against Civilisation. The wild, graceful gulls leap and scream, but their anger comes from lack of control, and results in a waste of energy. The too solid pigeons, physically unfit, but with

King, Parliament, and all the resources of the State behind them, don't acknowledge the threats by as much as a lift of the head. They just go on eating, shoulder to shoulder, monopolising the best. With their tight waistcoats and prosperous aspect, they are like shipping directors, and the gulls might be a deputation of mutinous Lascars, awed into futility by the weight of Cockspur Street.

One is apt to class seagulls with sailors, and to cherish the same delusions about them, forgetting that sailors are sometimes the scum of the earth. The seagull, so bold towards men, cuts a sorry figure among the other birds. If you go at four o'clock, when the keeper is feeding his charges, you will see the gulls gather over the pieces of fish he throws into the water. They hover, screaming and flapping, afraid to strike, afraid of the cormorant, who, invisible since he dived from a distant raft, will poke his black head up suddenly and snatch the morsel. Then they scatter, grumbling noisily, to look for another piece of fish, which they will never screw up courage enough to seize.

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Four o'clock is the great moment. The lonely members do not patronise it. They prefer the lunch hour, when there is no crowd and no rivalry. But the casual spectators gather in scores beside the keeper's house. Such a nice house, with trees behind it, and a view across the water to other trees and lawns. The most

rustic house in London, inhabited by a countryman running a countryman's job. He is the kind of man you find all over England, excepting London—a quiet man with a good colour and clear, steady eyes, a man who wears gaiters and stands square, with his feet apart, turning your words over in his mind before he ventures upon his guarded reply. Before he came to London he was in charge of a big private preserve in the country. Now he is in charge of a big private preserve in London. For aught I know, he even calls himself a Londoner. I never thought to ask him that. Although Trafalgar Square was only two minutes away, the question would have seemed absurd. Further, it would have caused countryside suspicion, always alert as an armed guard, to come tumbling out.

There are over thirty varieties of birds in his care, most of them water-fowl, but with a few landsmen such as peacocks and fancy pheasants. Some have been presented, some have been purchased; a few were hatched on the shores and islets of the lake. One of these, the sole fruit of five eggs laid in captivity, is the smaller of the two Magellan geese which walk about the lawn opposite Downing Street.

It would be tedious to enumerate even the comparatively few species I recognised. Besides, you can see them for yourself. They seem to spend their lives, most obligingly, in fulfilling the conventions. The geese waddle, the ducks swim, the moorhens dart, the cormorants dive,

the pelicans—but they cannot be dismissed in one word.

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If you are passing between 3.30 and 4, you will see the pelicans stamping up and down beside the railings in front of the keeper's house. They are great sticklers for etiquette, and if you stare and smile, or even if you only stare, you cannot plead ignorance or excuse your bad manners by saying you didn't know better. Your sin is on your own head. When once the pelican has looked at you, and his eye has shouted its message of propriety, you know that, though you be called archbishop, you are but a fallen brother.

As I was saying, they stamp up and down, emitting rapid, irritable squeaks, and from time to time a refined cough ; and when their indignant eyes have finished with you, they are turned on the keeper's house, the clock above the Horse Guards' Parade, and the other birds squealing, with such painful lack of self-control, for food. Nowhere do the pelicans see grounds for satisfaction. Looking down their long, solemn noses, they exchange meaning, exasperated glances with one another. "It's all wrong," they murmur, resentfully. So wrong that there is really very little that they can do. They can set a good example, of course. They always do. *Noblesse oblige*, my dear. But they have long ceased to expect much from that.

The gulls leap more wildly, the other birds scream louder, even the four pelicans lift their flat feet a little higher and pound the earth more heavily. The keeper, with a basket of fish, has just come round the corner of his dwelling. This is the signal for a "fall in," for a rough parade, with the pelicans in extended order forming the front rank. You might think they'd be rather pleased about this; that they would imagine their undisputed position was a tribute to the social distinction by which they set such store. But pelicans, you find, are never pleased. It's bad form. Almost everything is bad form, and to manifest pleasure is the worst form of all. That is why, with the front rank all to themselves, they keep looking testily over their shoulders at the other birds, at this *canaille* which actually cheers the arrival of the butler. "It's all wrong," they murmur again. "What would dear Louis XIV have said?"

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The keeper throws his lumps of fish, the pelicans stretch their vast beaks, and, like skilful lacrosse players, pouch most of the passes. They roll the mouthfuls over once or twice and then suddenly gulp them down. It looks an uncomfortable process, like posting a package which ought really to have been handed in over the counter. Only, in this case, it is the pillar-box, not the parcel, which is squeezed out of shape; the bird's long, tubular neck becomes broad and

flat as a cobra's hood. One pelican, who has been so unfortunate as to tear a slit in his pouch, was always losing his bit of fish because, as he turned it over, it would slip through the hole and fall to the ground. This necessitated him bending over sideways, as for a Swedish exercise, laying his head on the ground beside the fish, and scooping it up. Once, just as he was about to make good a loss in this way, a neighbouring pelican put his wide, flat foot over the morsel. The first pelican collected his mouthful, resumed the upright position, and began to chew. Quick as a one-horse 'bus, the second pelican detected something unusual, looked round, and noticed his foot being masticated in mid-air. With a firm, disapproving gesture, he removed it.

"Where are your table manners? That was my foot. You know I discourage liberties of any kind."

The first pelican continues to chew until he is convinced that his beak is really empty. This is the second time he has been done out of this same piece of fish, and he is in no mood for censure. "I simply don't understand you," he replies icily. "I'm eating fish. Or rather, I was."

"You were eating my foot."

They gaze at one another in indignation, and then, very reluctantly, begin to search the floor. They are just in time to see a gull, more courageous than most, hopping away with the missing fish. The two pelicans exchange a glance of

deep mistrust. Each has an idea that the other has been playing a joke, and all jokes are the worst possible form. They don't say anything, but they let it be seen that, if they go no further, it is because they prefer not to probe a rather unpleasant incident. Stiffly, suspiciously, they turn again towards the keeper.

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When the basket is empty, the keeper makes his way to the wooded peninsula, and all the ducks take to the water and crowd to the spot where he will reappear with grain. The pintail duck brings up the rear, its sharp, pointed tail like a pattern for the waxed moustaches of sergeant-majors. In the wood for which it is heading most of the birds live, and, except in the nesting season, they exist very amicably. Since the lake has been dry, a few have migrated to the Serpentine. On the other hand, the restriction of the water to a small patch near the keeper's house allows the passer-by to have, at all hours, a good view of the various specimens.

Soon the lawn is deserted, save for half-a-dozen sparrows pecking at a rolled-up paper bag. Down by the edge of the lake, the four pelicans survey the water with grave misgiving. An endless, wearisome shingle runs up the nape of each scraggy neck to a little silvery top-knot. By their attitude they suggest elderly spinsters about to embark on the Scenic Railway. As if they were tucking their decent skirts about them,

they hitch up their wings, exchange a flustered but still dignified look, and launch themselves unsteadily on to the waves. They are too excited to talk, but—my word!—what a story they'll have for the Vicar!

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In single file they float to the large rock, where already the cormorants are erect and flapping ceaselessly, as though they had another thousand words to semaphore before dusk. The pelicans arrive, mercifully without mishap, and still in single file ; still in the water, they make a tour of the rock. It is their home, where they have slept nightly for years, but they view it through their lorgnettes with extreme disfavour. When they are back at the nearest point of the rock, they land. It is, in fact, the landing point, but pelicans like to be sure of things in this unsatisfactory world. They land, clamber up to the first floor, and pause aghast.

“ Filthy! Why, the room hasn’t been touched.”

“ I shall lie down, just as I am, on the counterpane. I couldn’t, I couldn’t get into that bed. Don’t ask me to, dear.”

“ There must be a mistake! That agent would never have sent us here.”

At this, the fourth one descends carefully into the water and takes a good look at the number over the front door. The others wait expectantly. Expectant of the worst.

“ I suppose,” says the leader, “ it’s too late

to do anything to-night. But the first thing in the morning. . . . I don't know how you feel about it. . . ."

"Oh, my dear! Can you ask?"

They wave their wings aloft, and in the distance they seem to be shaking nightdresses down their skinny arms. One of them pauses, and casts an outraged glance towards the shore. "Not even blinds to the windows! It's all wrong."

I lower my eyes modestly and turn away.

CHAPTER VII

THE BROADCASTERS

IN a studio at Savoy Hill an elderly gentleman is delivering a lecture to two small marble cubes, blank and unforgiving, slung on a wooden stand. A young man, seated behind him, incautiously folds a piece of paper, causing it to emit a faint crunch. The old gentleman glances round testily, without interrupting the honeyed flow of words. Probably he is a dear old gentleman, who is merely suffering from temporary nerve strain and microphone fright. But he sets me thinking of all the little boys I know who would love to come and make faces at him. He couldn't tell them to go away, he couldn't even move without annoying half England and being held up to execration in the morrow's newspapers. What an opportunity! I sigh, thinking of my own colourless childhood. I sigh again, thinking of the inhospitable attitude taken up by the B.B.C. towards little boys who make faces.

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The studio is one of six, all differing in detail, but all alike in essentials. Its walls are hung with art linen, its ceiling is billowy with silk. It has no windows, but two electric fans and two

ventilating shafts do what they can with the air. The edge of the floor is lined with chairs ; there is a grand piano in one corner and a telephone-box in another. There is also a large clock, electrically controlled. Otherwise, the room contains nothing but a microphone—unless it be a second, or reserve, microphone. It is a pretty room, not exactly stuffy, but rather dead and oppressive in its atmosphere. The red bulb glowing above the door, so far from being cheerful, adds to the feeling of oppression, for it will shine relentlessly until the lecture ends, and while it shines no one dares enter or depart, speak or move about. It is a warning, a threat, an iron wall separating us from the careless world and, what is more irksome, from the man sitting in the next chair.

The lecture goes on, but it seems less like a lecture than an attempt to defy our isolation. The stillness is stronger than the words ; silence, which suffocates all speech in the end, crowds up very close to us here. It waits amongst us, holding its hand. It stalks the words as they stream away—whither ?

The question is not a rhetorical one. They stream into the microphone—two marble cubes or a metal disc, according to the type in use—and in the normal telephonic way surge, in the form of impulses, along the telephone wire attached to it. If the red bulb were not glowing, we could follow the wire from the microphone up to a large room, called the Control Room, at

the top of the building. All kinds of things happen here, of which two principally concern us. Here, in the first place, the lecturer's audibility is tested, in head-phone or loud-speaker, or both ; if it is necessary to move him nearer to, or farther from, the microphone, an illuminated bulb in the studio will bring the announcer to the telephone-box, where he can be instructed accordingly. By this means, as well as by various "controls," his voice can be brought to the required pitch and sonority. Meanwhile the lecturer's words, still inaudible save for the arbitrary tests in the Control Room, still in the form of impulses, are being redirected onwards along another telephone connecting Savoy Hill with the roof of Mr. Selfridge's shop in Oxford Street.

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On that roof there is a garden bordered on one side with the flags of all nations, on another by sudden heads of waitresses inhaling a breath of fresh air, and on a third side by a hut with glass walls. The interior of the hut is dazzling with the light of fifteen or twenty vast bulbs, big and golden as the bulb of yellow liquid in a chemist's window after the shop is illuminated. Even in winter they make the air more than cosy. In summer, the temperature in the little room will rise to the neighbourhood of 100 deg. In the middle of the light and the loud, droning hum, three young men sit at a table, whilst a fourth

speaks down the inevitable telephone. They are so young and beardless, and yet so responsible, they are perched so high amid their deathly plant, that I feel as if I had stepped into one of the early romances of H. G. Wells. A loud-speaker, fighting ineffectually against the hum, barks hoarsely from a corner of the room. Nobody listens, nobody can hear what it says, but its formless mouthing shows that the impulses are arriving unchecked on the telephone wire from Savoy Hill. The loud-speaker gives audible proof that the sequence is uninterrupted, and that there is no hitch requiring investigation. Here, unlike the Control Room, sound is tapped, not to ascertain its quality, but to make sure that it is still alive. Both tests might be omitted and still, barring accidents, the old gentleman's words, which passed into inaudibility when they entered the microphone, would travel in silence from the Embankment to Oxford Street, be launched in silence from the high towers rising slenderly beside the little shed, and be translated back into sound only by the magic of the headphones or loud-speaker in our homes.

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The thought of so many millions listening to such profound silence is bewildering. I found it a relief to be hurried through the passages of Savoy Hill and assured that I should now have all the noise I needed. We dashed round a corner, and skidded violently at the sight of a

red bulb's angry glow. But it went out almost immediately—an announcement was being made from another studio—and I entered.

"This," I said to myself as I passed tenderly between the chairs of some fifty or sixty musicians, "is more like it," and by "this" I meant the appearance of the room. For greater resonance, the hangings had been pinned back, revealing canvas linings patched and propped with wooden stays nailed on at all angles, like the back view of stage scenery. The charming studio I came from had seemed too artistic for art. My present surroundings struck me as more promising. As I reached a chair beside the microphone at the far end of the room the red light went up, the chatter ceased, and a young man, after glancing apprehensively about him, approached me.

"This," he remarked gently, almost apologetically, "is the London Station calling."

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So there he was—one of these young men who, if half what one hears be true, is deciding the future of our language. He and his *confrères*, I am told, are moulding English speech; that as they speak to-day, so will be the nation's accent to-morrow. What a responsibility! No wonder he looks a trifle harassed—but never mind what he looks like. It is his pronunciation which matters.

"Just two minutes, please, before we resume our evening programme."

Very quiet, clear, and correct. Good? Undoubtedly. Perfect? Since, poor modest young man, his influence, in spite of himself, is so immense and vital, he must be judged by the highest standards only. In the voice, which he shares in common with his fellow announcers, I seem to catch an echo, ever so faint, of the Oxford manner. It is the voice of an intellectual, for whom words are too fragile to be homely; the voice of a man who represents intellectual England; and the other part, the England of bird's-nesting and Bank Holidays, isn't to be found there at all. Yet it's a good England, and you can hear it in a truly English intonation like —well, Mr. Baldwin's. That's full of English life—the countryside, mud-pies, the familiar smell of one's hat on leaving church, Shakespeare, push-bikes, Constable's pictures, the front at Brighton, and the price of bacon. That's the voice I should like to hear in our streets.

No doubt there are difficulties in the way of employing the P.M. as an announcer. Still, I throw out the suggestion, free of charge. I merely wish to be of help.



There are about a dozen of us seated in chairs along the wall. The man on my left may be Signor M—— of the Scala, Milan, or he may be the brother-in-law of the commissionaire down-

stairs. The large lady on my right may be a nightingale ; she may be simply a nuisance, admitted by the management out of a dim and desperate longing for peace. Suddenly the silence grows tauter than ever. The conductor, mounted on a shallow dais, has raised his wand.

For a while I listen to the excellent orchestra, as I have so often listened before, in sitting-rooms in and out of London, with the greatest pleasure. In hearing at first hand sound which I had heard previously only at second hand, I experienced a thrill—the same sort of thrill, I suppose, as the crowd feels when Doug and Mary come through the revolving door at the Ritz. But presently my pleasure began to subside. The fifty odd players were only a few feet away ; their strains, and the reverberation deliberately encouraged by the drawing aside of the wall hangings, grew oppressive. I fancied the noise was making me feel hot, and then I noticed that I wasn't entirely the victim of fancy. The room was hot—very hot. There were about seventy people present, and, except for two grills in the ceiling, there was no ventilation. Even the electric fans had ceased. One of the more prominent performers had a bald head.

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More and more members of the orchestra removed their coats. The tenor, and then the bass, shed collar and tie. The soprano and the contralto, representing a hardier but still human

sex, gazed frequently and earnestly into pocket mirrors and dabbed their faces. And all the time the reverberation seemed to grow, until music became a pounding on the head, and Wagner mere din, and too much of it. The conductor kept pressing a finger into his left ear ; the bass sang a long solo with his hand held tight against his right ear. Probably they would have looked comical if one could have watched them through a window. But the room was windowless, and to us, their fellow victims in the rumbling avalanche of sound, they didn't seem at all comical. We pitied them for having only one hand free.

The announcer comforts the marble cubes with the promise of " . . . a well-known *aria* from *Madame Butterfly*" ; and the soprano, with a swift, humorous smile, as if acknowledging the epithet's hit, stands up. She is a very famous lady, and in her mouth music becomes music again, and we forget the heat and repercussion.

A young man in horn spectacles emerges from the telephone-box and signals wildly. Clearly the listener up above in the Control Room has sent word that the singer is too far from the microphone. Yes, but she has her back to the telephone-box. I gaze helplessly at everybody simultaneously ; I should break into profuse perspiration if I hadn't done so long ago. To my immense relief, the bass seated beside me catches the young man's eye, nods, and raises a finger. I glance at the soprano, and all my

horror returns. She has closed her eyes, and is singing in a sort of ecstasy. She sways, like a sleep-walker, draws herself up, and takes a quick step forwards. The young man bolts back into the telephone-box.

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"As we are a little behindhand with our evening programme . . ."

So quiet, so quiet. Yet they set in motion infinitesimal impulses, which, rippling along the wire, through the Control Room, across London to the glass hut on the roof, are there thrust up the high mast, and at the top, 225 ft. above Oxford Street, are taken by the scruff of the neck and hurled into the air, to lose themselves in space or be staked on somebody's aerial.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SEWERMEN

LIKE many people, I cherish a harmless and impracticable ambition to do everything before I die. It wastes a lot of our time, with its unwearied joy in dressing up Nothings to look like Somethings. But it has one great recommendation—it frequently makes us say Yes when our inclination is to say No. It, and it alone, was responsible for me saying Yes when an opportunity presented itself to enter London's sewers. Sewage, to speak truly, lights no answering gleam in my bosom, and even the engineering triumphs connected with its disposal are apt to lose their lustre in the fog of my ignorance of engineering. But reasons less frivolous than these are needed to justify the serious step of saying No. I accepted, and was given a rendezvous, not in dockland, not in Hackney Marshes, not in any of those harsh or remote places which one vaguely imagines as the homes of London's drainage, but at Langham Place. There was the Queen's Hall, where I had heard Cortot, Ysaye, Paderewski, Casals. There was the fashionable church where once, young and inexperienced, I had attended a Society wedding. There, too,

supporting Music and Love, was the Regent sewer.

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In the L.C.C. shed I changed into the regulation rig of waders, a short, rough serge jacket, and a hat like a clergyman's wideawake. The broad brim made me smile, and I nearly said something facetious about the risks of sunburn. I refrained, and later I was glad. That brim came in useful.

The section of the sewers which runs from Marylebone Road beneath Portland Place to Oxford Circus was undergoing its annual cleaning. Pailful after pailful of grit and sand was being hauled up by means of a winch and emptied on the road surface, to await removal in carts. This grit and sand, the washings of street gutters, sinks to the floor of the sewers and gradually silts them up. By the time the sewer receives its annual cleaning, this deposit is some inches deep, and is cleared out by the ton. It doesn't look like grit and sand ; it looks like sodden coal-dust, and is further remarkable for being absolutely useless.

As we waited for a lull in the working of the winch, I looked at the rising heaps of black rubbish and wondered why I had never noticed them before. At any given moment ten or a dozen of London's sewers are being rid of this encumbrance. During my life I must surely have passed such a scene many times, yet I had never observed it before. Humiliating reflection

for the lynx-eyed writer! I was positively relieved to see the winch come to rest, to know that the moment had arrived. Yet it wasn't only humility which made me step forward so briskly. That was partly vanity. Standing in the middle of the traffic a few hundred yards from Oxford Circus, and looking in my new hat and waders like the caricature of a Thames Valley curate, I was beginning to feel a conspicuous ass, and to wonder what malicious-tongued friend would be the first to recognise me in passing. . . .



I lowered myself carefully through a round hole, groped with my feet for the iron ladder, and found myself descending a round, brick-lined shaft. It was like Alice's entrance to Wonderland, only I didn't notice that at the time, perhaps because the rungs of the ladder were covered with slime, which flicked into my face every time I moved my hand. About thirty feet down an iron grill ran round three parts of the shaft, forming a platform, on which I was bidden to rest. Above, a small disc of sky lowered a little of the light of day ; beneath, dim figures moved in a black river whose ripples caught the rays of a swinging lantern. I expect that the view down into the keel of a ship is much the same as the view I was looking at.

"Come on!" said someone, as if the Red Queen had made her appearance too early in the story.

Another twenty feet or so, and my feet sank into the turgid, gurgling stream. An electric torch was thrust into my hand, and I saw that we were in another circular, brick-lined tube, six-and-a-half feet in diameter, running at right angles to the shaft. It stretched away in two directions, and I knew by the position of the ladder we had come down that the right arm went to Oxford Circus and the left to the Marylebone Road. It was this arm we entered, wading up-stream towards the Zoo, Lord's, Hampstead Heath, Scotland.

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This arm of the sewer was nearly emptied of its grit, and we met the last few trolleyfuls being wheeled along to the shaft. Our feet rested on firm floor, and the water slapped our shins and ankles with what should have been a happy sound. In a heather-bordered burn, how gaily the chatter would have fallen on the ear. But this river came—whence? It came from the baths and basins of late risers, men and women about town, actors and actresses, journalists, invalids, night-club musicians and attendants, night nurses, courtesans, and waiters; from the washing-up of breakfast things, from the scrubbing and pails of countless charwomen, housemaids, and housewives; from rain or molten snow, which, running down the street gutters, can fill the sewer to the top and make it impasseable until the stormy weather had abated;

from chauffeurs turning the hose on their cars ; from bars, from barbers, and from other sources I found less agreeable to contemplate. This was the moment I had been expecting since first the expedition started—the moment when it would be necessary to control the imagination. I had a spot of Coué ready for it. But it wasn't difficult, do you know. Outside the imagination there was just—nothing. Occasionally you may meet a little pocket of petrol vapour, which is worth noting, as it provides almost the only danger the sewage man encounters. (In spite of every effort made to trap it, a certain amount of petrol drains into the sewers, vaporises, joins up with the other eddies of petrol vapour, and floats along the top of the water ready to explode at the first naked light.) Beyond this there is nothing—nothing to trouble the most sensitive. Compared with the emanations of the canals of Venice, the air of the London sewer is Alpine in its purity.

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Down-stream, towards Oxford Circus, one experiences the need for the annual cleaning. The feet sink into inches of gritty sediment, and walking, especially when you turn back against the current, becomes hard work. The Regent sewer collects more than its share of this deposit, for it is an old tunnel, full of crevices—more than a century old. Quite historic, in fact, because it dates back to the pre-1855 era. I

can't tell you about 1855. Books have been written on that wonderful year, and I have only pages. But in the history of London drainage, 1855 occupies a position not inferior to that of 1453 in the history of civilisation. In the two hundred miles of sewers for which the L.C.C. is responsible on the north side of the Thames, it is rare to find a drain as old as the Regent. It is still possible to see here small private drains entering it at intervals, and spilling their contents from on high into the general stream. Now, like the shops above it, it is being rebuilt. We are due to see it in process of reconstruction, and we grope our way to the foot of that slimy ladder and begin the ascent. More splashes on the face. Another rest on the grill, because our waders weigh fourteen pounds when dry.

Tramping up Portland Place to the next shaft, we looked like a party of explorers. A small black Pomeranian yelps shrilly, and flies from us. Three girls, with Russian boots and plump knees, give me a glance such as I have never had before. Heaven forbid that I should pose as the recipient of Kind Looks from Girls. But when, half a life-boatman, half a curate, and altogether grimy and sticky, you walk the West End, people look at you openly, as something to be looked at, and no more. It makes a difference, you know, to their eyes and your feelings. Labouring men who have to spend their days in fashionable London get plenty of looks like these, I suppose. They must think us a rum lot.

Another descent similar to the first, another wade along a narrower tunnel—these old tunnels increase and diminish in arbitrary, inexplicable manner—and we find ourselves on a beautiful, dry, brick floor. The stream is diverted through a little wooden trough, and special bricklayers are laying a lovely new floor, so smooth that every particle of grit will waltz giddily along it and join the glad throng at Oxford Circus *en route* for Barking. These bricklayers, like the miners who make the excavations for our sewers and tubes, do no other work than this. The cleaners, who were filling the pails down by the Queen's Hall, are also a special gang. They number about eighty, and between them they scour all the L.C.C. sewers north of the Thames in the course of a year.

* * * *

I talked just now of Barking, and a word of explanation of the system as a whole may not be out of place. There are still districts—Finchley and Leyton are two of them—which are not on the L.C.C. drainage system. With these exceptions, all London is included in one comprehensive plan. Every street, practically, has its sewer, but large sewers like the Regent occur only at intervals. For instance, the next large sewer, going east, is beneath the Tottenham Court Road. Originally all the London sewers, following the fall of the land, ran down into the Thames. With the growth of London, this

simple solution of the problem became out of date, and now the sewers, in their course from high to low ground, are interrupted by main sewers flowing west to east. The lowest of these is beneath the Embankment. The next, going north, runs beneath Oxford Street, intercepting the Regent, amongst others. In these large laterals—and there are several of them—is collected all the sewage from the area immediately above them, and they in their turn converge on a place called Abbey Gate, where a large pumping station lifts their contents and sends it forward on its final rush to Barking. At Barking, millions of gallons of water and refuse are disposed of daily in various ways. Barking may be said to inaugurate a new and separate system, requiring a description and explanations of its own.

It is a marvellously efficient system, this drainage system of the metropolis, keeping millions of men and women in health while allowing them every convenience. For the men who organise and control it, it has a wild romance. How it appears to the workmen, for ever going down ladders to have a look at things, I can't say. For myself, I felt, even after a short visit, that I should never be clean again.

CHAPTER IX

THE KEEPERS ON THE BRIDGE

THE Tower Bridge is one of the seven thousand wonders of the world, but by an unimportant chance I happened to be a London child when it was first opened, just over thirty years ago, and therefore I shall never be able to take it quite, quite seriously. Indeed, I shouldn't be justified in writing about it at all if I hadn't found plenty of Londoners of my own age who were similarly wanting in respect for it. For us it will always be a super-toy, the largest and most expensive toy in the world, but still a toy. With bricks for the towers, knives for the spans, a tea-tray for the Pool, and for specification a copy of dear old *Black and White* after the grown-ups had quite finished with it, we played at Tower Bridge for weeks. It was all the rage, in our set, in 1894.

* * * *

If we had known how it wobbled, we should have thought it more amusing still. Everyone who has crossed it remembers that, as with all suspension bridges, the roadway shakes noticeably. But until, armed with the permission of the Bridge House Estates Committee of the Corporation of London, I mounted the eighty-

four stone steps of the small Abutment Tower on the southern side I didn't know that the entire edifice rocks and throbs and is never at rest. The little office at the top of the steps quivers as if it were shaken by the screw of a liner. It has, as I was soon to see, plenty to make it shake. But when, having presented my credentials, I obediently returned down the eighty-four steps, I didn't know anything about that. I was busy thinking how insecure the whole place felt ; and the fancied insecurity recalled, in its turn, another of my earliest impressions of the bridge. I remembered that, like old gentlemen in clubs, we had confidently predicted failure. The old gentlemen, no doubt, damned it as new-fangled. We contented ourselves with prophesying that it would get broken. That, we knew, was the unvarying end of toys far less elaborate than the Tower Bridge.

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When I reached the bottom of the spiral staircase I found the road jammed with traffic, and the bascules about to rise. Seen from a distance, the raising of the bascules is sufficiently impressive. Seen close to, it provides a different kind of surprise, and an even greater one. It seems only right for a thing with a formidable name like bascule to behave oddly. But it doesn't seem right for the roadway at your feet to rear up and forbid further progress by pointing straight to heaven. Such a very ordinary piece

of roadway, you know, made of wooden blocks, stained by horses and motors. Cigarette ends, little pebbles, a dead match or two, spilt coal, and other rubbish run down it ; occasionally at first and slowly, then frequently and fast, as the slope becomes steeper. Only the greasy mud sticks sulkily and refuses to budge. You can examine it at your leisure. It hangs in front of you vertically, like a picture on a wall.

From the moment you set foot on the bridge, you have felt fat and flabby. Your knees have wobbled. And now the road has risen up and hit you, or nearly. You begin to wonder whether you haven't a slight headache, and a nasty taste in the mouth.

* * * *

Two boats pass, the roadway sinks, the traffic starts with a bang. It is no more than one expects ; nevertheless, to produce this result, a good deal has happened. In the first place, the look-out men on the centre piers have assured themselves that there is no other vessel (*a*) wishing to pass (*b*) near enough to make the attempt before the bascules are lowered and raised again, and (*c*) too large to pass beneath the centre span. It would take you or me half an hour to make certain of (*a*), but these ex-sailors, in their glass-walled cabins, can see with half an eye whether any of the hundreds of ships in the crowded river, above and below the bridge, is showing the necessary signal—a black

ball by day, two red lights by night. Their difficulty is a more advanced one, and consists in calculating the speed and distance of the signalling vessels. It is obviously desirable that the road traffic be released as soon as possible, yet it is dangerous to lower the bascules unless they can be raised again in time for any approaching ship. It is a problem which does not allow of mistakes, and yet is incapable of exact solution ; for although the time required to lower or to raise the bascules is known (ninety seconds normally, sixty seconds in emergency), the time taken by the slowest vehicle to cross the bridge is not, and never can be, known.

The officials in the look-out cabins are satisfied, then, that the bascules may safely be lowered. The river signal is raised, and the river formally closed to large vessels. In other cabins, respectively at the north-east and south-east corners, men in control of an interlocking system of levers set in motion the machinery housed beneath them. The power, in the form of hydraulic pressure of 700 lb. to the square inch, is derived from a pumping station situated on the bank south-west of the structure.

When the bascules are once again lowered into position and the central bolts inserted, a road signal, similar to the river signals, drops, and the bridge resumes its rôle of thoroughfare.

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Below the lever cabins on the east side lie the

engine rooms, with duplicate machinery, and below these again lies the bascule chamber—a huge, dank, dripping cavern into which the 350 tons of counterweight descend when the bascules are raised. This is a most disquieting place. One views it from a narrow gallery ; and in the faint, green flicker of the incandescent lamp shining on the oozy floor far beneath it looks like a repository of dark, Inquisitorial secrets. There are dripping walls ; an endless flight of steps, which seems to serve no purpose and so arouses the wildest misgivings ; the pounding of the traffic overhead, a booming, rumbling, shaking, a marvellously faithful reproduction of a howitzer bombardment heard from a dug-out.

As if in answer to my thoughts, the mechanic shouts that here, forty feet underground, and with the high river tower above that again, they possessed the safest dug-out in London. During the war it had been used for this purpose by the Bridge officials—except for one man, who, having been teased about his nerve, would never again take shelter.

We crossed the vault, passed through a little door in the wall where a torturer might have waited with his ropes and pulleys and his heated irons, and emerged, up a twisting stairway, into a machinery room, twin to the one we had left. There were no levers in the cabin above—all the machinery is controlled from the eastern piers, and we had now passed beneath the bridge to the western side—but there was a distant view of

London Bridge, a grey shadow on the yellow mist. I looked at the river, already beginning to twinkle with lights, and at the old Tower, humble yet unabashed, beside its lanky new neighbour, and at the Henry VIII guns laid out like family gamps in a row—I looked, and I remembered what a magnificent view I ought to be getting. The overhead way, I cried. The footbridge at the top of the tower.

Alas!

I was years too late. Long ago, before the war, these two high level footways, with their lifts and staircases, were closed to the public. Designed to spare the fretted nerves of impatient pedestrians, they were—or so I had always imagined—crowded hourly with urgent breadwinners, men whose business, as Little Tich would say, can't wait. That was the idea. The practice was different. The great army of workers, those live, quivering wires of commerce, never used the overhead route, finding it more amusing, as well as more restful, to lean over the side and watch the pretty boats go by between the bascules. Nobody ascended the towers and walked along the top except a few conscientious Americans, Aberdonians, and such-like. . . . It seems a pity. The view from the top must be superb. But even before the war, the bridge, which is free to road and river traffic alike, cost £25,000 a year. To effect an economy, however slight, at the expense of a few sightseers, was, therefore, a step which . . . Quite! I should be the last to

stop accountants and auditors throwing their hats into the air. As a sightseer, though, I must beg to remain covered. That the high level footways still serve a purpose by carrying the water-pipes to the machinery on the northern side assuages my disappointment hardly at all.

Having just alluded to the costliness of the bridge, I am struck by the smallness of the staff which controls it. I met the look-out men, the mechanics, the men working the levers, and the men working the pumping-station ; and they made up not much more than a dozen in all. In fact, one's awed wonder at the knowledge of the designer is created by the self-sufficiency of the machinery as much as by its smooth working. The engines, of course, might have been specially prepared for a Royal inspection. I say "of course" because all big engines I have ever seen appear to have the power, not to be measured in units, of extracting from their attendants a proud and loving care not to be entirely accounted for by wages or even by discipline.

Until 1894 London Bridge was the most easterly of all the Thames bridges. This distinction now belongs to the Tower Bridge ; and, as if that weren't enough, Mr. E. V. Lucas has called it "the noblest bridge I know." To speak truly, I don't feel that way about it. Nobility, in this connection, I keep for architecture, not for engineering ; and this steel skeleton, clothed pretentiously in stone, strikes me as a mechanical snob, striving to join a society of which it can

never be part. There are many features in London about which, through familiarity, one has no clear opinion. The Mansion House, for instance, is a building I've passed so often that I've never looked at it properly; so with the London Pavilion, the Carlton Hotel, Brompton Oratory, and a hundred others. All these buildings, whether I have entered them or not, I class as friends, or at least as fellow Londoners. The Tower Bridge, on the other hand, insists on asking one's opinion. Very well. Since it insists— But Londoners don't like that kind of thing. They call it bad form, which means that it makes them uncomfortable.

Moreover, when the last horse has disappeared from the London streets and motor traffic reigns unchallenged, I imagine that the Tower Bridge will be destroyed in favour of another bridge, which, with its surface curved in a sharp, high bow, will permit large vessels to pass beneath it without interrupting the traffic of the roadway.



Meanwhile, it is its mechanism, the steel-heartedness it is so anxious to hide from people, which makes the bridge remarkable and gives it character. It should be described statistically —940 ft. in length, 60 ft. across in its approaches, 49 ft. wide at the centre span, and all that kind of thing—and nothing but the conviction that you don't read statistics hinders me from describing it in this way. I could get it all out

of the *Encyclopædia*. Nobody would have read the article there. The people who gather to watch the bascules rising are drawn, many of them, by the idle spectacle of "the bridge going up." The drivers of vehicles, whose memories are too short or whose years are too few for them to recall the day when they would have had to make a wide detour over London Bridge—they fume at the delay and at the passing ships. And to the passing ships themselves the bridge is nothing but a nuisance, a need for additional signalling. Nobody (except Mr. Lucas) loves this bridge, so marvellously designed, so admirably controlled. I feel that, beneath its proud exterior, it is a lonely bridge, which has never become one of us. Perhaps it consoles itself with the reflection that it is too good for its poor surroundings—that it would be more generally appreciated if it had been erected a few miles further west. Never was a wilder delusion cherished.

CHAPTER X

THE RACING MOTORIST

EVERY man, I suppose, admits that there are certain professions which under no conceivable circumstances could he have adopted. Many an operatic tenor, for instance, must know in his heart of hearts that he would never have succeeded as a steeplejack ; many a Swiss turns sick, no doubt, at the bare thought of the deep-sea fisherman. Among the careers thus closed to me, that of the racing motorist takes a high place. I am as convinced of this as are any of the people who have ever driven behind me, reviling me with their Klaxons. I can't say more.

So criss-cross, however, is the pattern of society that I number among my friends one of the great racing motorists of the world. They are, believe me, a select band, not more than perhaps fifteen in all—six or seven Americans, about the same number from the continent of Europe, and two or three in England—but I don't suppose there is anyone who dreams of excluding the name of my friend from that short list. In 1922 he established, at Brooklands, a world's record, which still stands, for the Double

Twelve (Hours), averaging 86·9 m.p.h. for the twenty-four hours. In setting up this world's record, he broke forty intermediate (class) records. (A world's record is a record for any car, a class record is a record for cars of a particular class or power.) On September 21st and 22nd, 1925, on the Montlhery track in France, he set up a world's record for twenty-four hours' consecutive driving, averaging 95 m.p.h., and beating three world's records and sixteen class records during the process. In 1924 he won, at Le Mans, the Grand Prix d'Endurance for twenty-four hours' driving on the road. At San Sebastian, again—but enough of these. I will only mention one other record which he holds—a Brooklands unofficial record in escapes. After completing a last lap, he had applied the brakes and slowed down to about 75 m.p.h., when the brake-lining ripped off. Car and driver shot up the embankment and into the telegraph wires, paused there a moment like a stone in a catapult, went on, and pitched to earth. He broke a rib or two, a leg or two, split a knee cap, crushed some ankle bones. When at last he was able to get about again he returned to the game, but he never tells this part of the story. I really believe he finds it lacking in interest.

* * * *

I asked him once what made him, with his zest for everything, turn to motoring and motor-racing.

" I thought it a wonderful thing," he answered, " that cars should move, and I didn't like the idea of understanding nothing about them. So I scraped together enough money to buy a tiny little car, second-hand ; had a lesson on it ; drove it a few times ; and then took it completely to pieces. When I fancied I saw how it worked, I put it together again, sold it, and bought another car of different make. I took that all to pieces, too ; observed where it varied from the first one ; shoved it together again, and sold it. I did this three or four times, and each time, as you will have guessed, I lost a little money. This annoyed me. I was only buying and selling, the same as the dealers, but they were making money out of me, and I was losing money to them. I didn't see the point of being on the losing side, especially as, with my growing knowledge, I was by now actually improving the cars during the process of reassembly. So I thought I might as well become a dealer. In fact, I did. But not long afterwards I bought a second-hand racing car—an odd, scratch affair made, for experimental purposes, by two continental firms in conjunction. I took it down to Brooklands, tinkered about with it, and finally got it going 6 m.p.h. faster than anybody, including the manufacturers, had ever done before. That attracted a little attention, and —well, that was the start."

I like that story, and I think it tells you a good deal about my man.

I suppose racing motorists vary like other people—drink or don't drink, marry happily or unhappily or not at all, love the town or love the country. I can speak only of the one I know. He is a lithe, active, energetic fellow, fond of swimming, riding, fencing, and all forms of exercise. With his natural love of keeping fit, he doesn't have to train.

"Besides," as he will say in a tone of indignation, "the driving of racing cars isn't sport! Some of the papers call it sport. I tell you," with growing disgust, "it's more like chess. You sit there watching all the blessed gauges, and trying to carry out your preconceived idea by keeping the car at the exact speed you intend, neither more nor less. Chess, that's what it's like, and playing the organ, and—well, anything but sport. There's nothing in the actual driving, you see."

"I don't see. You've just told me you're careful to keep the car from doing more than a certain speed. I can't understand why you should do that, but anyhow it shows that there's something in the driving."

He passed his hand across his eyes. "Of course there's something in the driving. But there's still more in the making of the plan to which the driver adheres. Or it may be that there's more in the previous driving than in the actual driving on the day itself, when it should be practically mechanical. You don't follow? Well look here. When I set up the record at

Montlhery, averaging 95 m.p.h. for twenty-four hours, do you know what was the fastest rate we recorded?—99 m.p.h."

"That's pretty steady driving!"

"Precisely. A few weeks earlier I had made a previous attempt on that record. For eighteen hours we averaged 98 m.p.h., and then something gave. The strain was too great. So when I made the second attempt, it was obvious that the strain to which the engine was to be subjected must be slightly reduced. Instead, then, of driving at just over 98, we drove at just over 95, and the engine held out for the twenty-four hours. Just a very simple calculation. But sport!"

"I didn't call it sport." He gave me one of his swift, warm smiles, and I went on: "What good do your efforts bring to the ordinary man buying an ordinary car?"

"None, or very little. Sometimes these tests result in a discovery which really affects road cars. But their principal result is to make the ordinary car dearer than it would otherwise be."

"Dearer!"

"Certainly. Think of the cost of these special cars, the rubbish heap of discarded and unpractical inventions, the wasted material, the time spent in experiment! Not long ago a foreign firm constructed a fleet of three cars to take part in these international contests. The venture cost them, from first to last, £22,000—£25,000. Another continental firm constructed a fleet of ten cars.

Suppose they don't win any prizes. Even suppose they do——”

“ Their sales go up.”

“ Yes, but they don't sell sixty cars where formerly they sold ten. They sell, possibly, fifteen where they sold twelve or thirteen. What's the good of that? Who is going to pay for that fleet of special cars? The new purchasers. There's nobody else.”

“ Can't the special cars be sold at fancy prices to enthusiastic amateurs ? ”

“ My dear chap, they're little more than scrap-iron by the time they've been through these tests. And as for selling them, with all their secrets! Why, those ten cars I mentioned were all broken up, the whole bag of tricks, and nothing now remains but a few pages of notes locked up in a desk. You couldn't even hire the fellow engaged to the eighth mechanic's cousin. He's ' retained,' they're all ' retained,' by the firm for fear they should give anything away. They all help to swell the price of the car, and they all render an invisible minimum of service to the firm's clients.”

“ Then why ever are the tests held ? ”

“ They combine the publicity and the experimental sides of the business. A manufacturer who does not compete still has experimental expenses and publicity expenses. If the manufacturer who spent the £20,000 odd on three cars had never built those cars, he would have had just the same to spend a fairly large sum in

experimental work and in obtaining a publicity equivalent to that which he gained from competing."

* * * *

"And now tell me about the driving. Is the strain tremendous, or is the boredom profound?"

"A bit of both. After an hour or two, you feel you'd like to go to sleep, so you try to think of something amusing to prevent that. But not too amusing, because of those wretched gauges, which need pretty close watching."

"How long do you drive at a stretch?"

"In the Continental twenty-four-hour test, there are two drivers, and they relieve one another every three hours, when the car stops for replenishing and overhauling. In the English twenty-four-hour test, which is run in two spans of twelve hours, owing to the fact that the residents near Brooklands have obtained an injunction against night-driving, I drove each day unrelieved—stopping, of course, every three hours. But the stops don't last long. There's a squad of twenty men waiting for you, and they can change all the wheels, and replenish everything in a minute and a half, or less."

"What is everything?"

"Petrol—the tank holds twenty-four gallons, and at fourteen miles to the gallon, that's nearly empty in three hours. Oil—you start with four and a half gallons, and that all goes in three hours. Then the bonnet may be coming off, and odds and ends like that."

" And the water. You've forgotten that."

" No, I've not. The water's all right. At 90 m.p.h. the engine is cooler than at 30 m.p.h. The air tears through without ever getting warmed up, and you have your engine air-cooled as well as water-cooled."

* * * *

I saw him a few days ago passing, with his light, unmetropolitan step, through the West End crowds. I thought of the days when it used to be a recognised thing that, after being dismissed from Church Parade on Sundays, one walked to the transport lines and watched him riding, one after another, any unbroken mules or horses which might have arrived during the week. I am one of the few people who ever saw him bucked off. He picked himself up from the ground, looking terribly ashamed and apologetic, as if the least a fellow could do, after people had walked half a mile to see him, was to succeed in sitting on.

I imagine that, in his desire to bust these bronchos, he was showing himself very typical of the great racing motorists. They must obviously be youngish men, strong, and (for all their disclaimer to be sportsmen) the possessors of a restless spirit of adventure, a love of danger, a desire to do everything before they die. Am I too romantic? One of them, a small provincial dealer, protests that he took up racing in order to advertise his garage, and now that he has

become one of the recognised chiefs of his profession he still runs his country garage, and scoops, I fancy, four-fifths of the business of the district. Perhaps he is satisfied. I don't know him, and can't say. The driving of racing cars is, I admit, a business.

Some day, I think, my friend will weary of driving racing cars. He will tell himself that he has got into a groove, and is in danger of becoming humdrum ; and then he will disappear and be heard of later—where ? At the top of Mount Everest, very keen, very serious, talking to himself as he picks his rope to pieces, discovers how it's made, and winds it up again ? Or President of a small southern Republic trying to beat the (class) record for longevity ?

He tells me that already he has lost his zest for ordinary driving, and is now, when not professionally engaged, the quietest and least obtrusive of owner-drivers. Frankly, I am glad. Once he offered, and I accepted, a lift for half a mile. . . . I don't often tell the story of that run, because I need thirty-five to forty minutes to do it justice, and people simply haven't the time for it. Not that anything actually happened. It is the things that nearly happened that makes the story. It is a wonderful story, and sometimes, in the long winter evenings, the old folk clamour to hear it once again.

CHAPTER XI

THE MANNEQUINS

I PASSED through the little ground-floor shop, redolent of the *parfum de la maison*, and ascended in a lift to the showroom. The last occasion on which I had entered a big dressmaker's was in Paris, when I attended an exhibition of spring models. The only man in the room, I had sat in a corner, mercifully ignored, while loose-limbed beauties rippled to and fro between clients, from whose faces the human masks, so it seemed, had been stripped. The room had been stuffy beyond belief, what with the crowd and the copious applications of a brand new *parfum de la maison*, but I remember shivering as I looked at the stony countenances of those mothers and sisters and sweethearts. Up and down, erect and undulating as poplars in a breeze, mannequins with careful, attentive faces dragged their languid limbs. Every now and then, in response to a meaning glance, one would pause, place her hand on her hip, turn to right, turn to left, and float onwards smooth as a stream.

I looked along the rows of customers, whispering, frowning, pointing, but never smiling. They were so intent, so watchful, it was impossible to guess whether they were enjoying themselves or

not. All expression, all vivacity had gone from their faces, leaving them tired and cold. "So this," it came to me, "is what women are like when there are no men present. This is what they really are." Everybody, weary sellers and weary buyers, watched hawklike. Occasionally somebody pounced hawklike, and a grave-eyed mannequin would pause, rest a hand on hip, turn to right, turn to left, and drift away, smooth as water. . . .

The show girls went on gliding and twisting. Nobody, it appeared, of all that crowd gave them a thought except me, and their cool, dispassionate glances swept past as though they were as mechanical as they were paid to be. Faintly, through closed windows, came noises from the Paris street; but here, in this man-free world, there was a buzzing that was just not silence, a hissing of sinister sibilants, of *deux mille cinq cents* and *deux mille sept cents cinquante*.

I shook myself free of my fancies and noted, with surprise, that the mannequins were not remarkable for beauty of face. There were eight of them, and only one was pretty. She, however, was very pretty, with hair of a most unusual shade of golden copper.

As she came swaying in our direction, I nudged my companion. "That's rather a pretty dress."

"Nobody ever wears that sort of thing," she explained quickly. "They have to make a few, just for the *demi-monde*."

I turned my attention more particularly to the

dress. It was, perhaps, rather dashing. Still, she was a lovely girl. About five minutes later she was back again, newly attired. I had a good look at her costume this time, and decided that nobody could take exception to it.

"That's not bad," I remarked carelessly.

My companion sniffed. "Everybody's going in for those. You see them by the thousand. . . . Don't you wait," she added kindly, "if you're bored."

"Bored!" I protested.

Somehow or other, though, I found myself down on the pavement a few minutes later. There was an east wind blowing, but the street seemed wonderfully warm and cheerful and gay. I lit a cigarette, and, looking up, met the friendly eye of the doorkeeper in his long, plum-coloured uniform.

But all that was in Paris, and a year ago.

I wondered what was awaiting me this time. The lift stopped, and steeling myself against another dose of Truth, I stepped out into a large apartment.

It was wonderfully peaceful, and somebody smiled at me as if to promise that, here at any rate, Truth would be suitably diluted. I had chosen a morning in autumn, as quiet an hour and as quiet a season as the trade ever knows, but I was not the first visitor. Lady Blank was there already; dear old Lady Blank, whose well-preserved features, gazing from a hansom-cab, were familiar to me in the days when I wore

woollen leggings and toddled along on the paving stones, stepping over the cracks, or planted my feet on the cracks and avoided the paving stones. At the sight of her my spirits rose.

* * * *

They rose still more at the sight of a dark, beautiful girl slinking up and down in a blue evening dress. I was wondering, gratefully, at her restlessness, when old Lady Blank beckoned to her, and seizing the skirt, began rubbing the material speculatively between her fingers. I stared. Was it possible? That dear old soul, in that vamp confection? Apparently, it was more than possible. Madame, and two assistant mesdames, said so at some length. Only the slim, dark girl said nothing. She was pulled about and turned about and hitched and tugged, as though the beauty of the dress were quite independent of her. I felt, as any man would, a love of justice surging within me. I wanted to call out "Hi, you know!" or "Look here, I say!" But at this moment the meeting broke up; the dark girl—or rather, the evening dress—was waved away into back regions and Lady Blank, in a whirl of words which left me uncertain whether she would or would not have the dress, disappeared into the lift.

In a very short space of time the dark girl returned, having exchanged her ball dress for the narrow grey frock or overall which is worn when models are not being displayed. This is

Miss Dina (Nadine), a Cossack, and she is accompanied by another mannequin, the fair-haired English Miss Madge. All things considered, they are, as they will admit, fortunate young ladies, the well-paid employees of a firm second to none, the possessors of a reference which will carry them successfully through their business careers. Not always, not everywhere, is it thus. A French girl, applying for the post of mannequin at a Paris house, must possess, not only a suitable face and figure, but also "a friend" of sound financial position who will back her candidature and, moreover, take her to the best restaurants and dancings, revues and racecourses, thus enabling her to appear in public in the latest models of the firm. Nor do the advantages of this system end here. Since the mannequin has of necessity a wealthy supporter, her employer sees no reason for paying her more than a starvation wage—really a starvation wage.*

It is a very convenient system. . . .

"But since," you naturally ask, "she has to have her rich admirer before she can get the job, how comes it that she is looking for work?"

The answer is, that the kind of man in question

* This description was given me by a lady in the dressmaking trade who knows the Paris mannequin intimately. A second lady, equally qualified to express an opinion, confirmed what the first had said. The evidence seemed conclusive until a third lady, no less authoritative, declared that it was a wild Anglo-Saxon libel on self-respecting girls with a powerful Union of their own. I wish to be fair to everyone, even to nations and sexes. I append this note as a reminder that each show-girl (like each riveter, pelican, boxer and interviewer) has her own truth.

likes his girl to be in a smart house. People recognise her when she is out with him, and this pleases his vanity. If she loses her job, she is in real danger of losing her gallant too.

* * * *

It should be said that some Paris firms will, for the sake of Anglo-Saxon customers, employ an English mannequin without compelling her, directly or indirectly, to conform to this practice. Presumably they think that allowances must be made for her insularity. There are, however, well-known London dressmakers who do not make these allowances, who pay Paris wages and expect Paris ways. I can think of few things which would give me greater pleasure than freedom to publish their names. What a sensation I should make, shouldn't I? There would be a howl of execration, lasting till the day when someone mentioned that these same designers had really surpassed themselves in their now spring models. . . .

"And I always think their things are so ladylike."

* * * *

As might be expected, both Miss Madge and Miss Dina learned their job before joining the firm with which they are now associated, and both obtained their first posts by simply walking in and asking for a trial.

"But was it so very simple?" I asked.

" Fairly," answered Miss Madge, but I didn't altogether believe her. " Still, my walk wasn't right at first, and I was advised to copy another mannequin, a French girl, who was supposed to walk very well. There are, you know, two walks, or two schools of walking," she went on. " The haughty walk, with no movement of the hips—rumoured to be taught by balancing a book on the head—and the light, happy, willowy walk, such as is in favour here."

" And can the knack of wearing clothes be taught also, or is that a gift ? "

The two girls smiled at one another, but whether at my simplicity, or whether at the thought of all the wisdom which they shared, I couldn't guess.

" I think that knack is merely a result of knowing how to walk," Miss Madge replied, and again I didn't altogether believe her. And yet, I don't know. . . . There seems to be a lot in this smart-lookin'-gel business, when you come to go into it.

For instance, I remarked that it seemed curious to me that two girls of identical build should be employed together, even though their figures were faultless.

" The same size!" they cried. " The same shape! "

I learned that they weren't in the least the same shape; that Miss Madge was twice as broad across the shoulders as Miss Dina.

" Have it your own way," I interrupted at

last, " but tell me this. You both keep on being called away to show off lovely cloaks and gowns, and very nice, if I may say so, you look in them. But I have fallen a victim to a terrible heresy. Let me whisper, so that Madame won't hear. All these costly creations have become meaningless in my eyes because I find that, in my opinion —and I'm certain that nine men out of ten would agree with me—you look more . . . more . . . fetching in your grey shop frocks."

" I'm sure most men would agree with you," said Miss Madge composedly. " But women dress for one another, you see, not for men."

And that's how one of the world's great puzzles was solved.

* * * *

" Do you like clothes ? " I had the bad taste to ask Miss Dina. But she had told me that, whenever she could, she went up to the Row to watch the people riding because, like all Cossacks, she adored horses, and that had established a slight bond between us and encouraged me in my effrontery.

" Yes," she said slowly, weighing the question carefully. " Oh, yes."

" Then doesn't it hurt you to show off a favourite dress when you know it's going to be mangled to suit someone like Lady Blank, who will mangle it all over again in the wearing ? "

" In the first place, we have no favourite dresses. When the models are unpacked, it is

amusing to wear them. But in a day or two we are so sick of them. *N'est-ce pas*, Madge? And in the second place, the gown will suit Lady Blank very well. Madame will . . . will . . . ah, adjust it, and it will be very nice, you will see."

"And why were you chosen to show it? Was it your turn?"

"It is my model. Each girl has her own models, and if a client wishes to see one of mine, she sees it on me."

"Then do you get a commission in the event of a sale?"

"No. In Paris, they talk of allowing a mannequin a very small commission. But here, where the pay is so much better, no."

"Sometimes," explained Miss Madge, "it really is our model, in the sense that it has been designed on us."

"Has the great Mr. W—— designed a dress on you?"

"Oh, yes. And a tiring job it is. Ordinarily, he's the kindest man alive; but when he's designing, he's an artist, and he becomes oblivious to everybody. With other girls gathered round holding various materials or various shades of the same material, you stand there feeling that you're making history. And it is very interesting, so long as his inspiration doesn't fail. Then he sits smoking cigarette after cigarette. Nobody must move until his thoughts return, and sometimes they're a long time settling."

I emerged into the life and bustle of London. It should have seemed, like the Paris street, very real after that ante-room to the palace of luxury, with its refined shades and its air impregnated with *parfum de la maison*. But it was the new Regent Street, with its pretentious façades, which seemed unreal beside Miss Dina, who comes from a land of horsemen, from Batum, on the shores of the Black Sea, and walks up and down showing French dresses to English ladies who don't mind where she comes from. For them she flutters and glints, and has learned the iridescence of the dragonfly; but she turns conversation to music and literature, holds views on Mrs. Garnett's translations, and finds the works of Mr. Arlen amusing.

I thought of that other intent and practised butterfly, Miss Madge; and I began to see that, whatever delusion I might be under as to their figures, the two mannequins presented a contrast which did credit even to a house famed for its subtle effects. With all her cosmopolitan finish, she has not ceased to be English. She has a permanence, a quiet indestructibility, which brought to my mind English soldiers tackling the war. French girls may be more this, American girls more that, Italian girls more the other; but when they had all done their damnedest I should expect to find that Miss Madge, while nobody was looking, had somehow taken the lead. She has entered on an un-English profession amid foreign surroundings,

and she has mastered the profession and absorbed the surroundings without sacrificing a millimetre of her neat, independent, self-reliant Londonness. She will have conversed with duchesses and advised princesses, she will have been ogled by goggle-eyed English gentlemen and flattered by graceful foreign counts, and I am prepared to bet—without any inside information—that she politely abstains from giving two hoots, or even one, for the lot of them.

CHAPTER XII

THE JOBMMASTER

Possibly you think of the London jobmaster as a rare bird, belonging to a species almost extinct—and you are right. Possibly you go on to suppose that he is therefore difficult to come by—and you are wrong. For his is a peculiar profession ; a dying profession, in the sense that competition has almost died out, a most lively profession in every other sense, because supply has shrunk more rapidly than demand.

I did not know all this, as, walking through the spacious squares and crescents of Belgravia, I looked for a certain mews. It had occurred to me to call on a jobmaster with whom I had formerly been acquainted and inquire how he did. Not having seen him for some years, I found myself, indeed, composing my features and hushing my tread as I approached his place of business. I thought, you see, that—well, I don't know what I thought, because at this moment I reached the mews and stood gazing at a strange yet familiar scene. In the mews, which smelt not of petrol but of straw ; where there was no roar of engines, merely horses' neighings ; where the passers-by kept a look-out for hoofs instead of hose-pipes ; in a mews, in

short, that really was a mews, horses were being led or ridden up and down by little men in gaiters. It "took one back," oh heavens, twenty years, when every London mews was like this. Those little men—they were "dapper," you know, and their "nags" were "a good stamp of animal." A private limousine was waiting just inside the mews, and I noticed that the chauffeur looked self-conscious and uncomfortable, as if he half suspected that in these surroundings he was new-fangled rather than smart. I understood his feelings, for I was myself still obsessed by the idea that I had turned round and was wading back up the stream of Time.

* * * *

There was a door labelled "Office," and I went in. A clean-shaven, raw-faced man, in a flat-brimmed billycock and a stiff box-cloth coat, was arguing in a low, husky tone with the clerk. Every now and then he wheezed, as if his lungs were full of chaff, and I observed that this was his means of laughing, and that his skin was capable of assuming a range of rare and beautiful tints, of which maroon was the palest. As I waited, I looked round the walls. There were cases crammed with rosettes, red, blue, or white, championships, firsts, seconds, thirds, highly commendeds, and commendeds, for hacks, hackneys, hunters, and coaching teams—rosettes which, held firmly between the teeth, had fluttered round the

cheering ring at Olympia, Richmond, Newbury, Doncaster, and a score of other places. There were photographs of spanking pairs in phaetons, of champion hacks, weight-carrying cobs, of pupils and four-in-hands. You could, if you were ignorant of such niceties, study the appropriate occasions for the black top-hat, the grey top-hat, and the bowler ; discover when buttonholes were and were not "in the picture," and observe just how the buff driving-rug was so neatly folded. Further along the wall a dozen whips arched their lashes over the whip-rests, and jostled their slim, polished, knotty shafts and ivory handles.

Mr. Weiler, sen., gave a long farewell wheeze, deepened from maroon via purple and indigo to the frontiers of black, and passed from my life and into the open air. I was beginning to realise that there was a London still existing where he would be considered as only a slight deviation from the norm. I was even willing to admit that his clothes were natural to him, and not chosen with any idea of pleasing Mr. Cecil Aldin. But it was not until I was shown, a few minutes later, into the Riding School that I realised that my whole attitude, from first to last, was mistaken. I had fondly imagined myself a sophisticated modern exploring a quiet backwater. It was borne in upon me, not without pain, that if anyone was out of date it was I.



Nearly a dozen young ladies and gentlemen

were cantering round the tan beneath the eye of Mr. Smith himself and two assistant riding-masters. There was no hint of Mr. Weller here, of course. The pupils were obviously the "right" people, the instructors were the last word in spruce correctness. I made some remark about Mr. Smith's two assistants, and was politely corrected.

"Two of his assistants."

"How many riding-masters does he employ, then?" I asked.

"Ten. You see, there are at least a hundred lessons to be given every day—generally more."

The class continued to canter, and I continued my attempts to lift myself out of my old-fashioned groove and adjust my motor-ridden views to modern requirements. I noticed that the young ladies were all riding side-saddle, and when, during an interval, I reached the centre of the ring, I asked Mr. Smith why this was. I had an idea that in the old days, before I was swept into limbo, girls were taking to men's saddles.

"Yes," he said, "but almost all our pupils ride to hounds, or wish to do so. That's why I discourage ladies from riding astride. They're much safer with a pommel."

"Don't you get medicinal pupils any longer? Is the liver brigade extinct?"

"The character of Rotten Row has changed. Hardly any of those who come to us nowadays have the idea of riding in the Park and nowhere

else. They ride in the Park, of course, but their real objective is the hunting-field. Even the children's class, where we have little boys and girls of four and upwards, is drawn almost entirely from hunting families living in London. One result of all this is that, on the whole, and in spite of many, many exceptions, the standard of riding in the Row is improving. Riders nowadays, whether beginners or not, are enthusiasts, and not merely church-paraders on horseback. It seems as if the horse, having been ousted so completely in some respects, is more precious than ever to horse lovers. . . . Now, ladies and gentlemen, please!"

* * * *

Round and round and round. Sit back a little more, miss. Tha-a-at's better. You, sir, you're losing your place. Touch him with your heel. Steady, steady! Remember what I said about your hands, my lord. And up in the Park, at this very moment, the children of four and upwards would be sitting back a little further, and touching him with their heels, and remembering their hands. I wondered what sort of hunting they would find in fifteen years' time. . . . I seemed to hear somebody saying, somewhere, at some time or other, "There will always be huntin'. It's in the English blood," and another voice replying, "Yes, but all this Socialistic legislation and . . . well, look at the Government." I seemed to see a decanter

glowing with reflected light, soft and ruby, and to smell . . . but at that point the mist cleared, and I found myself back in the Riding School among the dispersing class. Boots were being whacked, appointments made, toes flicked, suggestions offered. A sheaf of telephone messages was waiting for Mr. Smith ; also a client to interview. Then there were some letters to dictate.

* * * *

"Money talks," I reminded myself. "So why not listen to it ? Good hunters are more valuable to-day than ever before. They've gone up, like everything else, and even more, because the number of hunting people is still large while the number of breeders is less. The country doctor and parson can no longer afford to hunt ; neither their purse nor public opinion allows it. So, although hunting may be in the nation's blood, it is in the pockets of millionaires of no matter what nationality, as far removed from the nation's recreations as polo or real tennis. A hundred years ago the horse was a necessity. Now it is a luxury, and so, oddly enough, is the motor-car which has taken its place. It seems that, as civilisation grows more complex, bare necessities become barer still. Movement, except on the feet, is now a luxury."

I was pondering these difficult questions, and thinking how wonderful must be a man like the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who understands and knows the answer to them all, when Mr.

Smith rejoined me, and we slipped out for a breath of air and a chat about old times. At least, I thought we did, but I found out that he was on his way to see a purchaser, and that we were being followed by a man driving the horse in question. I don't suppose this will ever happen to me again, for the sale of hackneys is a branch of the business which would be stone dead to-day but for the Hackney Shows and a small yet persistent export trade. Even hackney breeders are beginning to see that they are beating in the void their luminous wings in vain. The supply of hacks, on the other hand, is still good, especially from Yorkshire and, of course, Ireland, that fairy godmother of all horses.

* * * *

It is odd how watertight become the divisions of any profession. The English thoroughbred, to which, in spite of countless attempts to injure its reputation, breeders of horses all the world over still come for the refreshing and maintenance of their stock, is a creature no jobmaster "touches." There are, of course, obvious reasons for this. But it is only by sending hunter mares to thoroughbred stallions that the standard of hunters is maintained. Any neglect of this principle leads inevitably to deterioration. Every hunting man knows this ; yet, while acknowledging the principle, he often seems to deplore the necessity, and attends the racecourse not at all, or in the grudging and contemptuous

frame of mind of Cain (*Back to Methuselah*, Act II) revisiting his parents.

* * * *

At Hyde Park Corner we parted ; Mr. Smith, followed by his brake, in the direction of his client, and I to my 'bus. It arrived shortly, and I eyed it with disfavour. All 'buses, it was revealed to me, were much of a muchness. Taxis formed a row down the middle of the wide street, and they were much of a muchness, too. So were all cars. They would give me no exercise, they would make no æsthetic or physical demand on me, but simply a financial. They had their "points," no doubt, but they were slightly disgusting points, such as good compression, accessibility of parts, and so on. Finally, as no hansom passed, I turned into the Park. I remembered a little tan track, kept especially for equestrians, and running beside the kerb all the way from the Achilles Statue to the Marble Arch. I found I was longing to know whether it was still there or had been worn away, blown away, rubbed away by pneumatic tyres. So I walked across to see. I hadn't thought of it for years, and I found that—but perhaps you know the answer:

CHAPTER XIII

THE PRIVATE INQUIRY AGENT

ALL educated men and women will protest with a smile that they have long ceased to believe in the private detective of fiction ; but there are few of them, I fancy, whose imagination is completely freed of the ghost of a lean, hatchet-faced man of strange moods and penetrating gaze. The violin may be dispensed with, and so may the hypodermic needle, the dressing-gown, and the tobacco in the Turkish slipper. But the great man himself, with his lantern jaws and his travelling cap and ulster—can my generation hope to be rid of him this side of the grave ? Of course not !

Holmes settled himself in his deep chair, closed his eyes, and placed the tips of his fingers together.

“ I was born,” began the newcomer, “ in Sligo, where my parents still live. I have two married sisters in Nebraska, and—I beg your pardon ? ”

Holmes’ lips moved gently. “ I was only correcting you,” he murmured.

“ Correcting me ! ”

“ You said two married sisters in Nebraska.

You mean three, of course, and all left-handed. Pray continue."

The man sprang to his feet. Even I, familiar as I was with my friend's methods and his childish love of the dramatic, stared at him in astonishment at this fresh proof of his powers.

In introducing you to the leading private inquiry agent in London, I am, then, actuated by a desire to give you the truth, but not by the hope that it will prevail.

* * * *

Off one of the busiest and most famous streets in the world there lies a little net of blind alleys in a district which is itself a species of *cul-de-sac*. The streets are quiet, the houses old and often beautiful, and as a result of these attractions the neighbourhood is inhabited by dramatists, authors, artistic folk of all kinds. You will find a publisher or two, a lawyer or two, but principally you will find an atmosphere of a hundred years ago. Turn in at one of those sleepy doorways, and mount the old staircase to the first floor. A man with a fresh complexion and white hair and moustache, who might be a lieutenant-general ; or he might be brother, so close is the resemblance, to the clerk of the most fashionable racecourse in England. This is he.

* * * *

His manner is noticeably smooth and easy,

but it isn't long before you observe beneath it a suggestion of alertness, persistency, and even, if one goes further, of something which—difficult to describe and slightly disturbing—is not quite relentlessness. He is a strongly built man, but you don't think of that when you are with him, and it isn't that which, if you were a wrong-doer and he were on your track, would worry you. No.... There is a story told of him which throws some light on what I mean. Once—it is a long time ago—he had tracked to his lodging in Soho a foreigner "wanted" on a charge of murder. There was no doubt about the man's guilt, or the violence of his nature, or the size and power of his person. The detective mounted the stairs, walked into the room where the man was lying in bed, and sat down on the edge of the mattress.

"If you feel like throwing me out of the window," he remarked, "I'm not strong enough to stop you. I've a man on the landing, though. That means you'll have two of us to tackle. Round the house are six more. Then there's the Vine Street police force—six hundred, I dare say. Then there are a thousand men, perhaps two, in Wellington Barracks. If you were to dress now, we might have a drink, and then I'd take you round so that you could tell your story, like a sensible chap."

The man swore a great deal, but complied. I should doubt, however, if the detective's arguments were responsible for his "sensible" behaviour. I think it was the detective's eye.

I think I know what that murderer felt. . . . As I cast about for the illuminating word, I find myself recalling those lady champions of lawn tennis of twenty years ago, who went on, hour after hour, returning the ball to within an inch of the line, until their opponents, broken in mind, nerve, and body, collapsed, and were thankfully eliminated. . . . If he were looking for me, I might, by the aid of luck and an ingenious dodge, evade him. A week—or a month—later, and another device would be needed, and then another. Gradually I should find that, until either he or I died, a *tour de force* would be required of me once a fortnight for ever. I should realise, I am sure, that I could never expect peace until, like Hook's crocodile, he had got me.

A horrible sensation. I wonder if all good detectives produce it. If so, I strongly recommend any man who is toying with the idea of crime to go and have a look at the other side first.

I imagined the detective would be a strong, silent man, uncommunicative, a born listener. I found I was mistaken. The ability to listen, and to listen closely, is his, but I am sure he has had to acquire it. On the other hand, he is a good talker, with a natural gift of expression which owes nothing, I think, to art. I imagined he would be a nondescript man, or perhaps a man with an actor's face, and I found him a striking-looking man, who never disguises him-

self or employs theatrical aids. Indeed, in the sort of case in which you might expect a disguise to be essential, he is apt not to appear until the final scene, and perhaps not even then. He is the centre of an organised staff, and much of his work consists in sitting in his office, considering and correlating the reports of his observers. What kind of people, you ask, are these observers? They are of all kinds; but they are not always ex-policemen, who are apt to have marked habits and demeanour. An enthusiastic boy or girl, however amateurish, is preferable and easier to train. In the man he sends out to watch a building or trail a person, the private detective looks for honesty and thoroughness, but not for imagination. Often, so as to be sure of getting the bare facts and nothing else, he does not tell his observers the nature of the case on which they are engaged. It will thus be seen that such an employee has little chance of becoming a trained detective in his turn. There is nothing, however, to prevent him setting up as one. Any man may do that, and does. London is full of private detectives of all kinds. Some are inexperienced. Others have too much experience of a kind which need not be mentioned here. At the best they are useless. At the worst they extract their clients' secrets for the purpose of blackmailing them.



This is no exaggerated account of the state of

affairs, and if the private inquiry agent is regarded with suspicion by the public as a whole, that suspicion is unfortunately only too well justified. There are probably not more than six private inquiry agents in London to-day who can be usefully and safely consulted. But, apart from honesty, how (it may be asked) can there be competent private detectives if those they employ and train are discouraged from thinking for themselves? It is a natural question, but it might be asked about all eminent detectives, in magazines and novels as well as in life. Where did Holmes and all his followers gain that wide experience of crime and criminals which they turn to such brilliant purpose? Hardly ever is this difficulty faced, or an explanation offered. Such experience, such knowledge, indeed, is almost unobtainable except in one way, and that is the way of service in the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard.

* * * *

If you reflect on the various forms which crime may take, and the countless methods which may be needed for its detection, the prime importance of experience begins to be apparent. Listen to one of the detective's stories which illustrates the point :

" I was once employed on a case where there were two wills in existence. My clients, who stood to gain by the earlier document, hoped to collect evidence to show that undue influence

had been used in the drawing-up and signing of the later one. For this purpose I was sent half-way across the world. I saw the alleged will, and succeeded in getting it photographed. I didn't bother about any more evidence, but returned immediately to England, because I was sure that there was now another and better way in which this will might be upset. I was sure that there had been forgery. I came back, produced my photograph, and was told by the dead man's lawyers and relatives that the signature was indisputable. I asked for some genuine signatures, and was given several from old cheques and letters. I had these photographed, and then, as the handwriting was very small, had all the photographs, including that of the signature on the will, enlarged so that the letters were about 8 in. high. After this nobody had any more doubt that the second will was a forgery. But the point is, that if it hadn't been for my experience—the half-dormant knowledge that works like instinct—nobody would ever have dreamed of contesting the handwriting."

* * * *

" And did your connection with the case end there ? "

" Oh dear, no. The next thing was to find the men who had witnessed this forgery. One was the real estate agent who held the document. Obviously he would never incriminate himself. The other was the dead man's chauffeur. I set

off again to the other side of the world, and went to the town where that 'will' had been witnessed. The chauffeur had left some months previously. But by great good fortune he was a bit of an athlete, and went in, amongst various pursuits, for boxing. Like many boxers, he took a fancy name, and called himself — Kid, blank being the name of his home town. I went there, and found his father, who, thinking I was a boxing promoter, put me again on his track. On I went, through three or four towns, each time drawing a week or so nearer to my man. Eventually I overtook him. He was now a swimming instructor. He was quite willing to tell the story—how he had been given a swell dinner, asked casually if he remembered his late master's handwriting, and, on replying that he did, begged to verify it on some document or other which hadn't been properly witnessed. He had complied, perhaps innocently, perhaps ignorantly, perhaps—well! I was three hours making out his statement. He signed it; and from that moment until I put him in the witness-box in London he was never left alone for an hour. Someone might have persuaded him to change his mind, you see. Or he might have met with an accident. . . ."

Life, even a detective's life, is not all like this. Much of his work is as dull as anybody else's work, and consists of tracing petty thefts in factories and similar uneventful and rather sordid tasks. Cases of blackmail figure far

less frequently in his list than you would suppose ; and I take this to show, not that blackmail is rare, but that it is generally successful. Believing this, I must also hold that the private inquiry agent is a necessary figure in society. By all means let us hope that neither you nor I, through our own fault or another's, may have to seek his aid. But if you do, don't drop in at the first brass plate you see, and don't rely on the advertisement columns of the daily papers. Go to Scotland Yard, or to the City Police, or to the police headquarters in the nearest big town, and ask for the name of a trustworthy and capable man. The police know all the private detectives. They are familiar with their records, they may even have worked with them or against them. Whatever doubts you may feel about certain activities of the police, in this matter you may rely on them not putting you wrong. Professional pride forbids it.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TRAINER

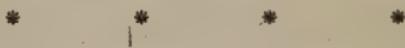
LIKE a sailor's or an actor's, a trainer's life is thought by many folk to be a gay and rollicking one. It is strange that, with so many papers and columns of papers devoted to the instruction of followers of horse-racing—ah! but there's the fallacy. The sporting journalists seem, many of them, anxious to encourage rather than dispel popular illusions. In their desire to warn their readers against rashness, they credit trainers with uncanny powers of foresight and dissimulation, turning them into supermen, making them unrecognisable. Especially the morning editions of the evening papers, with their high-flown epithets and their correspondence columns, love to dwell on plot and counter-plot, on coups, plans, mysteries, riddles, wizards, and cherry-ripe peas. A reader of these papers may well ask whether a Macchiavelli or a Disraeli would manage to figure in the list of Winning Trainers of the day. The answer is that they'll be welcome, though they are, by the sound of them, Dagoes. But they'll find training in this country a very different proposition to training on the Continent.

Many trainers rise at six in the morning, and are superintending the work of their horses soon after seven. The horses are divided into groups for trotting, cantering, half-speed, or full gallop, according to the programme, whereby each animal will, barring accidents, be brought to its fittest at the time when its most valuable or likely engagements fall due. Accidents, however, refuse to be barred. There are sore shins, sore backs, rapped fetlocks, and a score of other slight mishaps—not to mention more serious troubles, such as strained tendons—any one of which will dislocate the trainer's plans, so that they have to be completely changed or the horse subjected to a hurried preparation. Perhaps a trial has been arranged for this morning. The trainer must see that the weights are properly adjusted, and that no one, if possible, besides himself knows what they are—how much or how little has been slipped beneath the saddles. The exact significance of the gallop must not be allowed to leak out, and the gallop itself must be a true one, run at a fast pace from start to finish.

The trainer has owners ; owners like to bet, and are annoyed if they find that all the world, including the bookmakers, knows the details of the trial, or if they lose their money because the trial gallop was a false one. If he has succeeded in all these endeavours, and dodged the "touts," or watchers, who earn their living by forwarding details of the work to newspapers, bookmakers, tipsters, and backers—well, he can lead his string

homewards with an easy, though not an empty, mind.

Breakfast about 9.30. At eleven or thereabouts the second "lot" goes out, made up for the most part of young 'uns, two-year-olds, or first season horses—the terms are interchangeable. The early morning programme is, more or less, repeated. Home again for lunch, and after lunch, almost invariably a nap. It has been a pretty long morning, you see. Still, it has been a calm one, for I have described a day when the trainer has no horse running at a meeting. When he has a runner, he leaves the second lot to his head lad and goes off, by motor or train, immediately after breakfast. Perhaps he goes to a big distant meeting like Liverpool, where his horse is running in the 3.30 race. He sees the race, and promptly sets off back home, so as to be ready for the first lot in the morning. Sometimes he will have another horse (or horses) running at the same meeting on the following day. In that case he may stay the night at Liverpool, unless there is some special gallop in the morning at which he wishes to be present. Then he will return, see the gallop, and set off at once again for Liverpool, whence, after watching his horse perform well, disappointingly, or miserably, he starts back again for home and the next morning's work.



Early to bed and early to rise. If they aren't

BEFORE THE RACE



all healthy, they are at least as healthy as their constitution permits. If they aren't all wise, they are at least under no delusions as to their wisdom, for nowhere are mistakes more difficult to avoid than on the Turf, and nowhere is error more apt to prove disastrous and costly. Lastly, if they seldom leave fortunes when they die, they generally manage to give the impression of prosperity while they live. It is part of the game to dress the window, to look successful, to wear in public a smile of secret satisfaction, to spend carelessly and with broad gestures. Still, after making every allowance for their courage, I cannot say that this side of the business comes hard to them. Men who adopt a precarious profession, demanding a cool head and steady nerves, don't find it difficult to enjoy living, and living well.

They spring from all grades of society—ex-stableboys, ex-jockeys, ex-cavalry officers, peers, and the sons and brothers of peers, veterinary surgeons, ex-actors, farmers, and, especially, sons and grandsons and nephews and sons-in-law of other trainers. They are not all even bold and adventurous, and they have, in fact, only one quality in common—a knowledge of horseflesh. And, occasionally, not too much of that. Although it is a point to which the sporting press is strangely indifferent, there are bad, lazy, and ignorant trainers. The annoying thing is that, as in other walks of life, some of them do quite

well. It's a profession offering exceptional scope to the man who is merely lucky.

* * * *

Amid such diversity it is not easy to select a typical trainer. The man I have in mind is not one of the very big trainers, whose stables are so large that they have to delegate much of the routine work to assistants, but one of the less illustrious members of the profession—as well known as any in his way, a hard-working man with a string composed of twenty to thirty horses. The son of a small farmer, he ran away from home at the age of sixteen, accompanied by a younger brother. He kept himself and his brother by taking various small jobs, for which his knowledge and love of horses fitted him. Presently a hunting man who wished to win a point-to-point engaged him to help in the care and preparation of the horse. The race was duly won, and his patron and some of his patron's friends placed a few well-bred hunters in his charge with the idea of winning some jumping races. He was now, in a very small way, a professional trainer. He met with fair success, and gradually he and his patrons began to extend their operations to the Flat. Nothing very fashionable or expensive in the way of thoroughbreds fell to his lot, but one of his animals proved to be fairly useful, and he made the utmost of this half-chance. He began to be noticed, and soon, with the help of his patrons,

he was established in a stable of his own. Another "useful" horse came his way, with the result that a rich man, wishing to try his luck on the Turf, commissioned him to buy one or two young horses.

Eighteen months later the "little" trainer had become a "big" trainer, with some forty horses belonging to the millionaire and some ten or twelve more the property of his original supporters. Then, just as suddenly as he had made it, the millionaire lost his fortune. The horses were sold. The stable was almost empty. As long as he had been the successful trainer of a rich man, the boxes could have been filled twice over. Now, nobody wanted them. There was an aura of failure round the place which owners, superstitious men with big interests elsewhere, and neither time nor inclination to discriminate between varieties of failure, recognised and avoided. For the next two years his shrunk string, consisting of seven or eight horses, mostly his own property, aroused no interest among the touts on the Berkshire downs. His successes were negligible, and he lived by keeping a sharp look-out for likely, inexpensive yearlings, which he bought cheap and resold, usually at a profit. One of these was purchased by a millionaire—the Turf is full of these convenient gentry, but, as a rule, someone else has seen them first—and it turned out to be a high-class animal. The millionaire was delighted, and the delight of millionaires is wonderfully infectious.

Our trainer began to experience what the boxing world calls a "come-back"—not a very big one, but still a distinct return. People recollect ed his name and features. The millionaire himself, although already possessing a huge establishment and a competent trainer in another part of the country, showed his acknowledgments by sending half-a-dozen horses which, apart from being welcome for their own sakes, flaunted the famous jacket in public—a strident, free advertisement.

* * * * *

It is characteristic of this trainer, and of most trainers, that during the dark days he and his establishment were as spick and span as ever. He couldn't stop you guessing his state of mind, if you were determined to ; but he could, and did, avoid giving a hint that there was anything to guess. Outwardly, he remained the even, contented man he had been in prosperity. If there is one thing he despises more than discouragement after failure it is swollen-headedness after success. He has seen too many ups and downs—unearned ups, unmerited downs—to have time for the swanker.

"What a good season — is having!" I remarked to him one day, mentioning another trainer.

"Splendid!" he answered. "He's only got to win a few more races, and he won't be able to bend at all. I was watchin' him in the pad-

dock at Windsor the other day, wonderin' what he'd do if he dropped his umbrella."

* * * *

Between six and seven every evening, just before the horses are bedded down, he makes the round of the boxes, accompanied by his head lad bearing a little tray of ointments and antiseptics. All four legs of each horse are carefully felt, any little pimples or sore places on the body are examined. The boy in charge of the animal reports anything of importance he may have noticed—a failure to "eat up," a suspicion of a cold or a cough, digestive derangement, tenderness or wincing while being groomed. For each horse the trainer has a separate, affectionate greeting, full of many triumphs and more disappointments shared in common; and they all know his high-pitched voice, and turn their heads at the sound of it. He has stories of the peculiarities and doings of them all, for they are his intimate friends—even those old ruffians who never win. He has met only one horse in his life that couldn't bear the sight of him.

"And he was a good 'oss," he adds regretfully. It's an old story now, but he's still a bit puzzled.

After he has bent down and felt about 100 legs (he used to examine 200 nightly), he gives the head lad an outline of the morrow's work and retires to his room. These two hours or so left before he goes to bed may be filled in a number of ways. He may have a few letters to

write to his owners ; he can study "races to close," in case there are any engagements to be made ; see whether any forfeits are due ; telephone to a jockey or jockeys whose services he requires ; telephone to other trainers ; send out bills, or pay the corn merchant and the saddler ; and all the time and above all scan the book of form in an endless attempt to estimate the chances of his runners. Nobody but he knows just how good or how bad they are. Very often he cannot tell. And if he can, he is still in the wood—the mysterious forest where other trainers, other horses, are the trees.

CHAPTER XV

THE ENGINE DRIVER

UNNATURALLY bulky, I swayed down No. 3 platform. Officially as well as unofficially I had been warned against the cold. It was 11 a.m., and the 11.10 for Birmingham, Shrewsbury, Chester, and Birkenhead was already well populated. The luncheon-cars and the open compartments looked wonderfully snug, and I noticed with a shiver that the groups of passengers standing outside the doors had the same padded appearance as I had. An east wind, excruciating as the squeak of a slate pencil, was sweeping Praed Street. Wounded, but still vicious, it limped about Paddington Station, making complexions blotchy and whispering of blunt razors. I walked on to where the glass roof ended and the platform, like an exposed limb, lay bare and dead. A little gust of sleet blew in my face, and with it there came backing in beside me the "Princess Victoria Augusta" and her tender. I handed the driver my pass.

"That's all right," he remarked. I clambered up into a glow of warm, oily, comfortable air. "Bitter cold," he added with a compassionate smile.

"Snow at Brummagem," completed the fireman.

In an atmosphere at least 25 degrees above that of Praed Street, I stared at them in amazement. It had never struck me that an orchid could imagine itself an edelweiss.

* * * *

They put me in a corner by the near or left-hand window, where I was out of the way ; warned me not to touch the exhaust pipe ; and then we glided out into the world with that smoothness which, as far as my experience goes, is the monopoly of English engine drivers. And, to anticipate a little, we said how d'ye do and good-bye to smoothness in one breath. There is probably no finer permanent way in the world than that of the G.W.R. ; the "Princess," while not of the very latest type, is a magnificent locomotive, but we had gone only a few yards before I discovered that engines, like camels, have their own gait. The driver and fireman remained fairly steady—they have acquired their railroad legs. But in my little corner I was the human shuttlecock of an iron battledore. The faster the engine travelled, the more violently it lurched. I lurched with it—or rather, as I was always a second late, I lurched against it. In front was the smooth window, on my left the smooth iron wall. Nothing to catch hold of there. Only on my right was there a feature,

a support—the exhaust pipe. I recalled the fireman's words.

"Don't touch that! It's——," he had paused to swallow, "it's very hot."

* * * *

To reach the "new" route to Birmingham, via Acton, we make a sudden swerve to the right, and, without a word of warning or apology, cut across a dozen streaming lines. Habit is swifter than reason; I experience a definite shock of disapproval at the driver's neglect to put out a hand. A series of bumps and bangs helps to remind me that we are not shod with balloon tyres. The driver, his left hand caressing the big lever and moving it gently upwards, stares fixedly through his window. His policemen are there, up above our level—hundreds of them, square and notched, red and yellow, extending and drooping. Apparently they wave him on. We gather speed; the policemen grow fewer, until even I can distinguish the arm that matters to us from the arms which may shake their menacing fists against the sky in vain. The driver never ceases to stare, save for one brief second when he looks across at me, smiles and yells. It is useless. Not a word penetrates the hiss and rattle of the engine. I have no mind to try to walk across to him. Before his responsibility, I feel slightly scared. Besides, I could never reach him. Too much is happening in between us.

The driver, watching signals and judging pace (there is no speedometer on a locomotive), works silently and invisibly, in his head. The "showy" job on the footplate is the fireman's, and the whole of the central space is left free for him. His work, like a clergyman's, is never done. First, of course, he stokes the engine. This means grasping a shovel about half the size of a hip-bath, thrusting it into the heap of coal, opening the furnace door, and turning round and raising the shovelful. The mouth of the furnace is almost exactly the same size as the lip of the shovel; yet, with unbelievable precision, the fireman will shoot his load to the particular part of the fire in need of replenishment. Given the muscular development, a man might stoke the near end fairly easily. To reach the front, or more distant region of the fire, a strong thrust, accompanied by a flick of the wrists, is needed. Perfect timing, perfect aim. He must have slung in over a hundred of these huge shovelfuls between London and Birmingham, and never once did I hear the shovel touch the furnace mouth or see the smallest lump of coal fall back. I should have liked to see his muscles. But it was winter time, with snow at Brummagem.

When he isn't stuffing coal into that voracious mouth, he may choose any one of a number of supplementary tasks. He lets down the scoop to catch up water from the troughs between the rails. More frequently, he will be turning a hose on to the tender behind him and giving the coal

a thorough soaking. There is a back draught into the cab of an engine, and if the coal is not kept wetted, life is made impossible by coal dust. Or he may be swinging his hammer, breaking up the larger lumps to a size convenient for shovelling. Or, like a giant dentist, he may be selecting from his rack a pointed instrument, three yards long or so, with which he can stab and prod the furthest recesses of the open, quivering mouth. Or he may turn into a housemaid, and tidy up the floor with a little brush. Then there are the frequent curves in the track, and when these are from right to left, the driver is unsighted by the long boiler, and the fireman has to lend his eyes.

It was in a very rare moment of leisure that the fireman put his mouth to my ear and shouted, "We shall be getting up speed pretty soon now."

I turned carefully and looked at him. He smiled and nodded encouragingly. The engine was quivering and straining like a horse with the bit between its teeth. For some time past I had supposed we were just guiding it, and hoping for the best. I learned from the fireman that, on the contrary, we had so far been grinding painfully up a gradient which would only end at High Wycombe. Presently High Wycombe fled past us. I thrust my feet against the wall, and waited. Nothing in particular seemed to happen. I was wondering whether I might not be insensible to the more subtle differences of speed, when Princes Risboro' hove in view. A harmless place, pleasant even ; but at the sight of it the

engine seemed to stiffen, to gather itself together. If it had been a horse before, it was like a dog now. It leaped at Princes Risboro' as though it loathed it ; and Princes Risboro' fell back appalled, and only just in time. We missed it by a hair.

* * * *

This was speed, and the sensation of speed. They don't always go together. Blackthorn flashed by, and the long, straight stretch through Bicester, where the platform was packed with white, scared faces, all lifted accusingly at me, all seeming to cry, "Why, there's a third man on the engine!" Roaring and screaming into Ardley's long, curving tunnel, black as beneath the bedclothes, with nothing visible but the glow of the furnace on the belly of the smoky serpent slithering back over our heads. They have their own peculiar thrill, these headlong dashes into inkiness—like falling downstairs in the night, when one's thoughts, as far as one has any, are divided between a hatred of continuing to fall and a fear of being painfully impeded. Out again ; between Banbury's platforms, spacious but deserted, as if the inhabitants had fled at our approach ; on and on, and on and on, always seeming to have piled speed so high that it must topple, and always adding one more brick, and then one more, to the swaying edifice ; on and on, until a swerve in the track at Leamington Spa brings a momentary respite. We slip a

carriage here ; and as I look back and the curve of the line brings our tail into view, I recollect, for the first time since Paddington, the long coaches full of passengers behind us. Strange to think how smoothly they have been travelling. Buffeted about on the engine, with the whole train hidden by the coal-blackened wall of the front coach, I had forgotten all about them, so quiet with their newspapers and their knitting. For a moment I forgot the "Princess" too. Free of Leamington, she chose that moment to tip me violently against the exhaust pipe. . . . Every word the fireman had said was true, but the truest was the word he swallowed.



We were due at Birmingham at 1.10, and of the 111 miles about twenty remained. I began to wonder how the driver, with no speedometer and no stopping-place at which to check his rate of progress, could hope to keep more than a rough, approximate punctuality. I am still wondering. I suppose he glanced at his watch occasionally, but I was standing within a few feet of him and never saw him do so. It was difficult to believe he wasn't just banging on, trusting to luck and his familiarity with the route. Perhaps he was. When, without a pause of any kind, the train emerged from the long tunnel leading to Snow Hill Station and drew up at the platform, the first thing I did was to look for the station clock. It was the one-tennest

thing you ever saw. Nothing could have been one-tenner. It was, in fact, one ten—what musicians call the very middle of the note.

* * * *

The 4 o'clock from Birmingham to London was drawn by the "Abbotsbury Castle," and if you are an engineer, your heart leaps at this statement. The G.W.R. "Castle" engines, a new type, are the admiration of the locomotive world. Even I could see that this was a Rolls-Royce among locomotives ; but ignorance, as well as loyalty to the "Princess Victoria Augusta," prevents me saying much about the "Abbotsbury Castle," except that she was slightly roomier and distinctly less violent in her gait. The increased smoothness of motion detracted from the sensation of speed, but added to the sensation of power. I soon found, too, that she was warmer than the other. I expected that, on the return journey, my automobile-trained eye would be getting accustomed to the economy of space on the permanent way. But independent of me, it still went on calculating whether we could get past a signal or under a bridge ; and I still have an uneasy feeling that a small place called Cropredy had a particularly narrow escape. Seen straight ahead through the window of an engine, the countryside presents new features and undergoes new changes. Especially I noticed the sociable stretches where roads above or beneath cross the line

every quarter of a mile, and those other countries which, divided by the railroad as by mountains or the sea, keep themselves to themselves and hold no intercourse with the foreigners opposite.

Just after five o'clock came the first lit signal, and soon there were only lights to go by. For a time they were easy to follow—always a group of four lights, three of them red and ours, the second from the left, green. But as we approached London, the signs multiplied. There was always a green light, sometimes several green lights, and I knew one of them must be ours for the simple reason that we went on. But the system had passed far beyond me. After Acton, we advanced into a coloured Milky Way. There were hundreds of lights in the sky. One of them was ours, but in that apparently patternless profusion—which? I looked at the driver with something of the awe I feel for astronomers, and for the first and only time all day I caught him looking at his watch. We had been slowed down for a few hundred yards outside High Wycombe, and no doubt his calculations had been thrown into the wildest confusion. For when we steamed into the crystal palace known as Paddington, we were a minute late.

The driver wiped his hands and turned to me. "I haven't been driving this engine the last day or two," he said. I think he was apologising.

CHAPTER XVI

THE RIVER PILOT

SHADWELL DOCK, at six o'clock on a January morning. In the policeman's hut the gas ring shines as brightly as if it were midnight, and one hears, but only half sees, ragged figures hurrying to their ships.

"Is this Pierhead?" I ask.

The policeman tells me that it is.

"I'm looking for a boat called the *Drake*."

"The *Drake*? She's berthed higher up. One of my mates just told me so. Said she didn't look like starting, either. There's a boat coming now," he goes on easily. "It might be her."

This is worse than a country railway station. However, it is not the *Drake*.

"If I were you," begins the policeman, and a minute later I am walking across a bridge to the opposite wharf.

"Hurry up!" sings a voice from the darkness. It isn't the policeman's voice, so it doesn't occur to me to hurry. I reach the further side, I hear a noise behind me, and, on looking round, I see the bridge swinging across the water. I stand and watch the boat pass, and feel that I have made a bad start.

Where I now stand the night is darker still.

I bump into a kind man who, after hearing my difficulties, recommends me to return to Pierhead as soon as the bridge is in place again. As I can see nothing, I promise eagerly to take his advice.

* * * *

Back at Pierhead, another policeman has come on duty.

"The *Drake!*!" he echoes. "Now, if I were you," and I set off in a fresh direction, with full and foolproof instructions. I grope along the edge of a dock, where sheds cast black shadows and leave only a few feet for walking. Presently the way is blocked by a pile of something unloaded or waiting to be loaded. I step on it, and it slides ominously towards the water. I step off it hurriedly, and wonder what it is. It emits a sharp crunch, like coke, but there is a fair amount of white in its appearance. It suggests, in the almost pitch dark, a heap of broken cocoanuts. Whatever it is, I take a dislike to it. However, there is no choice, so I step on it again. Again it slides towards the edge, and again I step back. Finally I hurl myself on it, in the hope of taking it by surprise and getting across it before it realises what I'm doing. But it is humorous stuff, and this time it doesn't move. I pick myself up on the other side, and grope on. Another fifty steps, and the wharf ends abruptly. This can't be right. But there isn't a soul about. There's nothing but the water in front and those imitation cocoanuts

behind. I feel infinitely young, helpless, and pathetic. I haven't got a nanny to cry for, but I nearly cry for Mr. Tomlinson.

* * * *

At last I am on the right path. I find another wharf, another bridge, another policeman, all exactly like the first.

"I'm trying to find a boat called the *Drake*," I explained.

The policeman looks at me as if he had heard of me already. By this time I must have begun about twenty conversations with these words; I had, so to speak, agents everywhere, looking for the *Drake*, and no doubt he had met some of them.

"If I were you," said the policeman, when I had sobbed out my story, "I should go back to Pierhead." I started off again, but had stumbled only eighty or a hundred yards when I heard his voice in the darkness recalling me. I turned and rejoined him. (Later, I learned that he and his mates were merely night watchmen dressed up in policemen's clothes, who had no power of arrest. But it didn't matter. I should never have dreamed of disobeying.) He explained that perhaps, after all, I should be better with him. I expect someone had told him I wasn't safe to be trusted. But the reason he gave was that the *Drake* was bound to stop in the lock over which he presided.

Presently there was a shout in the distance,

and the policeman told me that the *Drake* was coming now. A large vessel with a green eye loomed high in the darkness, and I was all worked up, when he announced that it wasn't the *Drake* after all. It was the *Mallard*. The *Mallard* went through the lock, and some barges took its place—a clot of barges which were hauled out by one man and a rope, just as, with a twig, one dislodges a patch of spawn from the surface of a stream. And then at last came the *Drake*.

"Is Mr. Burrell — ?" I cried ; and at the same instant I recognised the head of my friend, the river pilot, and heard his cheery greeting. A rope ladder was thrown over the side. The policeman said, "Up you go!" and somebody on board called, "Wait a minute!"

* * * *

The S.S. *Drake*, a port wine boat of some 1,850 tons, commanded by Captain Goodson, is bound for Oporto, and carries no cargo on the outward journey. The lock can take considerably larger vessels ; nevertheless, she seemed to fill it, and until she glided out with a yard or two of black water on either side, it was difficult to believe that the miracle of her entry could be repeated. Delicately she threaded her way through the barges, which, like hungry diners waiting for tables, were crowded together outside. I waved to a policeman—I couldn't

distinguish his features, but we were sure to be old friends—and then, as we nosed our way gently, gently into the Lower Pool and reached the river itself, I saw that night had given way to early morning. The soft, grey clouds puffed and swelled themselves into a pale cerise, like the feathers on a parrot's breast ; and a lovely Wrenlike spire, which may be detestable at noontide, rose airily behind the shapeless warren of Shadwell.

“A little to port!” sings the pilot.

“A little to port!” murmurs the melancholy statue at the wheel.

The river, wrapped in a mauve-grey mist, starred with occasional lights, and striped with the chimneys of waterside factories, gives its daily imitation of Whistler.

“Steady!”

We are going a little faster, though not very fast. The morning mist still clings, and a good number of other craft dispute our possession of Limehouse Reach. But this, I learn, is the quiet hour. A little later, and the strange, Seine-like loop into which the river here is forced by the dreary Isle of Dogs will be packed with vessels of all kinds.

Hundreds of gulls wheel round and over us, screaming and diving. The air is thick with their graceful flights, as the river is thick with the refuse they fight for. The breeze is freshening, the mist is rolling away, and the grey, littered river lies in a frame of masts and spires,



LONDON RIVER

moored barges, cranes, and high chimneys, whose smoke is blown in bands across the picture.

That square building is the Greenwich Hotel, whither our fathers and grandfathers, in the days before one could spill a drop of juice in the old flivver and boost off to Brighton for a spot of lunch, drove down in their phaetons and landaus for the sake of the whitebait. Greenwich Hospital and College, designed as a palace for William and Mary, strike a sudden, unexpected note of elegance and roomy splendour.

The W. India Dock, the E. India Dock, and then, hard-a-port, round the hairpin bend out of the loop into Bugsby's Reach. Who was Bugsby? I forgot to ask the pilot, but he would certainly have known.



There are three kinds of pilot on the Lower Thames. Vessels under 3,500 tons, trading coastwise, are not compelled to employ a pilot unless passengers are carried, but men known as "exempt pilots" are available for such craft, if required. For other vessels, there are the "compulsory river pilots"; their beat runs from London Bridge to the east boundary of Gravesend. Beyond that point, "channel pilots" reign between Dunge Ness on the south and Orford Ness on the north. The pilot on the *Drake*, since she carried a passenger and was not trading coastwise, belonged to the second category.

There is work for no fewer than one hundred "compulsory" and forty "exempt" pilots, and they form a curiously independent body. Their president, or "Ruler of Pilots," is elected by the London Trinity House from the local pilot service ; they receive no salaries, and for their livelihood depend on their fees (calculated per footage and tonnage), which are paid directly to each pilot or his agent. They maintain their own landing-stage, with club or waiting-room ; their own cutters for joining or leaving vessels, and the cutters' crews ; in short, they "find" everything, which means that there is an annual bill of some £4,500 to be shared between them. Although they are liable to be called upon by any foreign vessel, in practice each pilot works almost exclusively for certain shipping lines. For convenience sake, both their own and their employers', the pilots form themselves into groups of three or four. In this way regular employment and reasonable certainty of being able to answer any call are secured.

* * * *

What a time these explanations take ! Here we are already at King George V Dock, the last big dock we shall pass until we reach Tilbury, and I haven't said a word about Furness Withy's wharf and dock, or Yarrow's old shipbuilding yard, or a dozen others. Already, too, Woolwich Arsenal has begun its large and lengthy lease of the right bank. Across the way is Barking. I

nod to Barking. It reminds me of my visit to the sewers, and is a link with the world I know. But Mr. Burrell knows all about it, too. He knows everything, that man—the history of every construction and ruin on either bank. . . . In an hour or two, when all those moored barges are loose, there will be no time for local history. Barges furrow the pilot's brow as bicycles furrow the 'bus-driver's. They are worse than bicycles, for they are built four times as large as they were twenty years ago.

To become a river pilot, a lad must first go to sea. After seven years afloat, he may enter his name as a candidate, but he takes the first real step towards his goal when he obtains a master's certificate. When this is accomplished, he notifies London Trinity House, and is in turn notified when he is within a year or two of being called. He is then expected to act as mate or master of a vessel trading over the waters on which he wishes to be licensed, and later he must, at his own expense, spend three months (i.e. make one hundred trips) accompanying a pilot over those same waters. There follow very severe medical and eyesight tests, and a practical examination which, if passed, secures him a licence for vessels of 14 ft. draft. To these he is limited for three years, when, by dint of another examination and a good record, he becomes fully qualified at the maximum age of thirty-eight. If he continues to pass the annual test of eyesight, he may hold his licence until he is seventy.

Past Erith, round Crayford Ness into Long Reach, where a sailing-ship with four masts rests, low and balanced as a bird, on the tide. Even the officer on duty, who has been expressing with great clearness his views on cold winds, early starts, and seafaring life in general, falls silent at the sight of her. There are worse fates, it seems, than serving on a steam-propelled boat. . . . Here's Purfleet, and the hotel which produced a political crisis, for it once sheltered Parnell and Mrs. O'Shea. (What? Bless your heart, no. The pilot told me.) Greenhithe, and—

“ Starboard a little! ”

The helmsman whimpers, “ Starboard a little! ” He has had a first-rate breakfast, I know. I saw it going his way before he took over. What makes him so sad? His grey hairs? The bitter wind? Or regret for good times in Wapping? A quiet man, as anyone can see. I don't think he ever rants and roars, or has even heard of “ Spanish Ladies.” He has a pale, watery eye, and a voice, I bet, to match it; a voice never raised, save perhaps in some whining, querulous version of “ Tea for Two ” or “ I'll Take Her Back.”

The great docks of Tilbury, full of monsters, and the sloping town of Gravesend. The cutter, trailing an arc of white foam, comes swirling out from shore. Captain Goodson smiles, “ Well! ” the rope ladder does duty again, and the *Drake*, shaking herself free like a mastiff bothered by a terrier, proceeds down the broadening river. By

the time we reach the landing-stage she is a distant, misty spectre, broadside on, heading north down the Lower Hope for Canvey Island and the river-mouth. The Gravesend clocks, those of them which deign to notice the divisions of the hours, are striking the half after nine.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CANALS

You may sometimes have toyed with the notion that the road in which you live would lead you, if you walked far enough along it, to Edinburgh, Norwich, or Penzance. But it may be news to you that the brown stream flowing in the "cutting" beside the Zoological Gardens is part of a continuous water route, and comes to the Thames from Liverpool, Manchester and York. As a child, I used to think it was ornamental water, serving no purpose save, perhaps, to keep people who hadn't paid their sixpences from having a close view of the rhino and the hippo. And still, even now, it costs me an effort to realise that it is a highway, a competitor wrestling daily with the rumbling lorries and the clanking goods trains. It is so quiet, so slow seeming ; one overlooks the fact that it is also so cheap. One forgets, in these days of express delivery, that there are endless consignments of heavy, non-perishable goods such as oil, coal, cement, building materials, marble, straw-boards, in which the cost and not the rapidity of transport is the deciding factor between acceptance and refusal, between profit and loss. One forgets.

It sounds better like that, than to admit that most of us have never known or cared.

"How jolly!" we remark, pointing from the window of the railway compartment to river craft, to father, mother and children floating along in their water caravan.

"Awfully jolly!" someone agrees. "I've often thought I should like to do that."

"Funny! So have I.... What's the time?"

* * * *

On their long treks up and down the water routes of England, the boatmen and their wives still live on board, as their fathers and mothers for generations before them. They are a self-contained party. They have their own lock-keys with which they pass through the many unattended locks in their course. They have their horse, towing them by day and coming aboard, like them, to eat and sleep when the vessel is secured for the night. But the children have changed. The Minister of Education has been after them, and they are being taken now to sit in school, to enjoy the rich feast of learning, instead of dangling their bare legs over the gunwale, tracing patterns in the water with their toes, while England, hour after hour, day after day, slides by.

* * * *

The water beside the Zoo, inaccurately alluded to by most Londoners as the Regent's Park

Canal, is in reality the Regent's Canal, or part of it. Besides being the canal which Londoners know best, it is the beginning and the end of the canal system of the country. It is not the oldest canal (it was opened in 1820) or the longest (it is only $8\frac{1}{2}$ miles in extent). What gives it importance is its position.

Its eastern extremity is a private dock on the Thames at Limehouse, where coasting and foreign vessels, as well as barges, can load and unload. Regular services of steamers ply between this dock and Belgian and Norwegian ports. The canal proper begins at the northern exit from the dock, and immediately passes beneath Commercial Road, through Stepney, to Mile End and Bethnal Green. The locks, too, begin at once with the Commercial Road Lock, and there are two or three more in the next mile and a half. There are also, of course, wharves of every description lining the canal banks, so that a great deal of collecting and delivery goes on irrespective of the Dock lower down. Electric light generating stations, timber yards, hay and straw merchant's warehouses, and factories of all kinds, border the canal and are served by it daily ; and inevitably, in the train of this commerce, have followed lightermen, wharfingers, warehousemen, and various contractors, all with premises of their own.

At Bethnal Green the Hertford Union Canal, running off in a north-easterly direction, connects the Regent's Canal with the River Lea, and

thence, northwards, with Bishop's Stortford and Hertford. It is worth noting as an example, the first we come to, of the countless small canals all over the country joining up the larger canals with the rivers and with one another. There is also, at this point, another characteristic feature —the old Great Eastern Railway Goods Depôt at Devonshire Street. It is characteristic for the reason that all the northern railways are tapped by the Regent's Canal, and exchange traffic direct with it. There are wharves at King's Cross, at St. Pancras, at Camden Town (the old London and North Western Railway), at Marylebone, and at Paddington, where the canal changes its name and its proprietors and becomes the Grand Junction Canal.

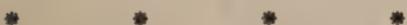
* * * *

We left our canal at Bethnal Green, and we must return to that point for the last time. I know you are longing to get to the Zoo, but you will enjoy that bit all the more if you will give yourself the trouble of understanding what has happened before we reach there. At Bethnal Green, then, the canal bends westwards, forms the south-west boundary of Victoria Park, and then proceeds due west through Shoreditch, Haggerston, and Hoxton. Here, dividing the canal into, roughly, two equal parts, is the City Road Basin, the Central London waterside depôt, connected by a daily service of steamboats with the Midlands, Birmingham and the North.

These and other vessels proceeding upstream have barely left the basin before they vanish from view in the Islington tunnel. When they reappear, a third of a mile later, they are at Caledonian Road, on the outskirts of King's Cross. A big sweep northwards, to take in the goods dépôt at Camden Town, and then the canal, shying at Primrose Hill, turns southwards to Regent's Park. You must master your disappointment a moment longer while we stop and explore a short arm of water extending southeast. This runs down to the Cumberland Basin, adjoining Cumberland Market—that littered but pleasantly unexpected space which lies ignored, save by the residents and a few painters and poets, between Albany Street and the Hampstead Road. Well, now we can go on round Regent's Park. And really I don't know what all the hurry's been about. This is the stretch of water which first comes, I admit, to the minds of many of us when the Regent's Canal is mentioned, and it is about the dullest stretch between Limehouse and Paddington. The thick water slides souplily and emptily along through a sham and unconvincing countryside where unnaturally precipitous banks—but I needn't go on. You know all about it—all, except that there was once a scheme for running a covered railroad along the same cutting beside the canal. The scheme was abandoned owing to lack of financial support, but coloured prints, showing the final shape of the project as seen by the mind's eye of the designer,

are still in existence. Beneath midsummer foliage, between trim floral beds, ladies and gentlemen, preoccupied with the dread of a compromising word or glance, patrol the gravelled roof of the tunnel. Perhaps they liked the smoke, or perhaps the rumble of the passing trains gave them a moment in which to think of something to say next. They never lived, and so we can never know.

You can walk along the bank to the western extremity of the park, where the canal dives under the Finchley Road, and enters the railway yard at Marylebone. Thence, beneath the Edgware Road, you come to Paddington, and here, $8\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Limehouse, the Regent's Canal becomes the Grand Junction Canal. It doesn't lose this new name until leaving London by way of Kensal Green, leaving Middlesex, nicking an edge off Hertfordshire, and traversing most of the length of Bucks, it comes to Northampton, and joins the River Nene.

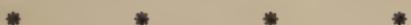


From this point, one of the principal canal junctions in the country, the route to Birmingham is via the Warwick and Napton and the Warwick and Birmingham Canals. (The industrial Midlands are a network of canals, whereas agricultural East Anglia, with all its drainage canals, is a comparatively small user of waterways.) Another route, due north through Leicester,

Loughborough and Nottingham, leads into the Trent, and then, from the mouth of the Humber, to Leeds and York. From Leeds, the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, via Bradford and Blackburn, serves the purpose suggested by its title ; returns, under the name of the Duke of Bridgewater's Canal, to Manchester ; and then, by the Huddersfield, the Barnsley, and the Dean and Dove Canals, the River Don is reached, and the loop completed at the mouth of the Humber. This loop—Leeds, Blackburn, Liverpool, Manchester, Goole—lies east of Liverpool. Southwards from Liverpool, the Birmingham and Liverpool Junction Canal leads to Worcester and Birmingham, and thence, by the River Nene and the Grand Junction Canal, to Limehouse ; while the Trent and Mersey Canal, from Liverpool to Derby, joins up with the York-Leicester-London route at a point between Nottingham and Loughborough.

I have omitted dozens of small canals, and several large ones, like the Macclesfield Canal. I have barely hinted at the scores of occasions when the artificial thoroughfare is merged, for a longer or shorter period, in the river. Already the description is sufficiently complicated. But this, simply and roughly as I have given it, is the main circuit. If you knew it already, pass on. If you didn't, it is worth pausing to note that you can row from London to York, York to Liverpool, Liverpool to Gloucester, and Gloucester to London without ever leaving your boat.

Although the canals were made for varying purposes at widely different dates, the law of supply and demand has corrected much of what was haphazard in the system. Unwanted canals, like the lovely neglected stretch to which Basing-stoke gave its name, have fallen into disuse and disrepair, and their owners have lost their money. Canals, like fishing rivers, have owners. The Regent's Canal is owned by one company, the Grand Junction Canal by another ; and these companies have their offices in the City, like stockbrokers or merchants. The Regent's Canal and Dock Company, to give it the proper title, owns no barges. Its revenue is derived from a toll levied on all vessels using its locks and water-way. Its expenditure is incurred in dredging the canal, and in maintaining the bridges, the towing-path, the lock-gates, a staff of clerks, lock-keepers, stablemen, etc., and a stable which, liable to vary, normally consists of twenty-five to thirty horses. In addition, it shares with the adjoining company the upkeep of the Brent and the Ruislip Reservoirs, with their long channels or " feeders," whereby an adequate body of water is secured. The costly process of pumping water from the river into the bed of the canal is resorted to only in times of severe drought.



I don't know if I'm voicing anyone's opinion but my own when I say that I find myself in

sympathy with this method of transport. Although the barges are built by man, the canal dug by men, and even the water between its banks comes from man-made reservoirs, there is about the whole process something of the simplicity of an act of God. The Americans, I have heard, envy us our canal system, not on sentimental grounds but because all man's ingenuity has failed to discover a cheaper medium of transport for non-perishable goods.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GENTLEMAN OF THE CHORUS

To many a patron of the musical stage, the ladies of the chorus are almost the principal attraction. Whatever they may be individually, collectively they are pretty girls, becomingly and often very expensively dressed in clothes which challenge all their femininity and make them feel that they really are the lovely, laughing heart-breakers they are supposed to be. Their names appear on the programmes—an unindividualised bunch, it is true, frequently without Christian names and in smaller type, yet sufficient to enable a determined admirer to identify them if he cares to make a few inquiries. Thus they can indulge in two sets of hopes. They have their professional hopes of being noticed one day by the manager and turned into a star : and they have their social hopes of being noticed one day by a gentleman in the stalls and turned into a countess, or at least an owner-driver.

The gentlemen of the chorus, on the other hand, are irradiated by no such dreams. They have no social expectations, their very names are suppressed. They cannot afford to entertain, and they are seldom or never entertained.

Instead of a lovely dress which would inspire any woman who is a woman, they have as a rule day and evening suits which would rob a Valentino of distinction. Even their professional hopes are nearly dead. Most of these men have been in the business for years, and they have almost forgotten their dreams of fame and become reconciled to partnering the girls in concerted numbers and forming an unostentatious horseshoe behind the leading lady.

* * * *

They are real men, with separate histories, you know, these chorus gentlemen—"choristers," if you want to use the right professional term. A., very likely, is a real chorister, a man who sings on Sundays in the choir of a fashionable West-end church, and adds to his earnings by stage work. He is a quiet, inoffensive fellow, not very young, not very strong on the dancing, but worth two ordinary men in the choruses. B. is a second-rate but versatile actor, whom you will have seen scores of times in small parts in melodrama, comedy and even Shakespeare. He has been having a bad period lately, and he is doing chorus work "till the luck changes, old man." Does he really believe that it will change? He's a plucky chap, and it's impossible to say. Will it change? Equally impossible to say.

C. is a boy of twenty-one. He hasn't long been in the profession, and is immensely elated

at finding himself in a London success. His voice isn't much, but he is a neat dancer. There are men at the top of the tree who haven't, as far as he can see, any better equipment, and he doesn't believe the older hands when they tell him that it is by influence, not talent, that opportunities come. He means to work hard, and the miracle may happen—he may succeed. In the meantime he is perhaps the only happy member of his chorus. He is rather dashing in his manner to the girls, accepts their amused smiles as evidence that he has a way with him, and wonders whether anybody else had noticed that the leading lady has a special manner of saying "Good evening" to him. D. teaches singing and voice production ; he is a man of education and a competent musician. For stage purposes he may be classed with A.

E. is a public-school boy, half-way through the thirties. Men of his type are to be found in increasing numbers in the chorus. The old type of chorus man, the "tough" customer, still exists, but he is on the decrease, and is being replaced by the impoverished or Bohemian gentleman, manly and active or effeminate and "artistic," according to the character of the production. The same process, caused partly by the rapid social upheavals of the war and post-war years, is going on in the other half of the chorus, where girls of good stock and education are ousting the rough, ignorant young women described in *A Mummer's Wife* and countless

other novels. The change is very far from being complete, even in London, but it is taking place.

* * * *

We might consider E., therefore, as a type of the chorus gentleman of to-day. At the age of sixteen he expressed a wish to go on the stage. His parents objected. When, five years later, he became his own master and the recipient of a small legacy, he entered a well-known dramatic academy. It is the boast of this academy that it places its pupils as they are proficient. E. became more and more proficient, but nothing happened except that his legacy grew smaller and smaller. Then, one day, one important day, when he turned from a boy into a man, it occurred to him that, as long as he paid his fees, the proprietor of the academy would continue to regard him as one with much to learn. He therefore announced his intention of leaving, and the academy, true to its promises, found him a job consisting of three weeks rehearsals (unpaid) and four weeks' playing at fifteen shillings a week.

That was fifteen years ago. Now he draws, as chorus gentleman, £4 a week. (The ladies receive £3 10s. Perhaps this is merely another example of a woman doing the same work as a man for a smaller wage. Perhaps it is felt that, as some chorus girls live with their parents or are married, they have not the same expenses as the men. Perhaps it is reckoned that girls have

ways of supplementing their pay. You can choose which answer you like, according to your temperament, your liver and your glands. In the profession nobody seems very definite on this point.) Four pounds a week needs, in any case, careful budgeting when, in addition, something of it has to be put aside for the spell of unemployment which will probably succeed the run. . . .

E. allowed himself sixpence a day for luxuries. Cigarettes, you know, and drinks, and matches, and newspapers. . . . Well, cigarettes.

* * * *

He is unmarried. He has seen, even more than the rest of us, what unsuccessful marriage can mean, and he is by now his own housekeeper, cook, tailor and mender. If he lives very frugally, and the piece has a long run, he can accumulate a small balance and a presentable wardrobe. These disappear if the slack time is prolonged, and he lives indoors, in pyjamas, in order to save his one remaining suit as far as possible. At all costs, that suit must be kept stylish and whole for the daily tour, from 10 a.m. till noon, of the agencies.

"Not," he will tell you, "that I believe much in agents. I've generally found work by personal application, or by attending auditions."

Before leaving the subject of clothes, it may be of interest to add that the chorus gentleman's entire stage outfit, from top to toe, is provided

by the management, but this returns to store at the end of the run. E.'s personal wardrobe, like his monetary balance, comes out of what he saves from £4 a week. Through this wardrobe, so painfully acquired, so swiftly dispersed, the fortunate reader may view, as through a little window or peephole, all those precarious arts and professions where good appearance is essential, employment sporadic, and remuneration low.

Not a great life, in truth. Yet, if we are going the deal in truth, it must be admitted that E., on the whole, likes the life, and wouldn't give it up. In spite of all the hardships and deprivations he has suffered and expects to suffer, in spite of the enforced proximity to much that must be almost intolerable to a man of his upbringing, in spite of deceptions, disappointments, and rebuffs, he remains, in my opinion, stage-struck. What other explanation is there? He is lost to his kith and kin, who regard him as the black sheep of the fold, the skeleton in the cupboard—yet he sticks to his job. He is convinced—or, rather, he *knows*—that no man or woman can hope to rise in the profession without influence—yet he goes on, without influence, but not altogether without hope. I suppose all actors are stage-struck, and I'm sure that many of us who go to see them are slightly stage-struck throughout life. This is not the place to discuss the glamour of the stage, to try and discover in what it consists. But it exists, and it can hold even a steady-

going, hardworking, self-respecting, cultured man like E. through fifteen long years of disillusionment.

* * * *

He likes the variations, the excitement, and even the uncertainty, for there are two sides to uncertainty. Like many of his fellows, he has starved, but he has also played the lead. He has been in "straight" comedy, but found it dull. He has understudied many famous artists ; and, although understudying is a pastime of which he is now rather weary, having found that it entails much extra work for nothing, yet it once resulted in him playing the lead in the West End. He took the part at a moment's notice, and played it for the remainder of the run. The principal he replaced had drawn a salary of £50 a week. E. was given £8 a week, and a verbal promise of better engagements to come. At the end of the run, having served his purpose by saving the management £42 a week, he was dropped.

Possibly he didn't give complete satisfaction. Nevertheless, there are managers who wouldn't have treated him so, managers who behave as decently and generously as their frequently embarrassed affairs will permit. And they aren't always the men you would guess, either. That is, to me, one of the pleasures of talking to stage folk—they turn the magic carpet, and, lo! the pattern is reversed. The manager who sacked the principal at £50 a week, put in a man who

didn't dare refuse the job at £8 a week, and failed to recollect what he might have said in conversation—well, you know, we theatre-goers revere him as a wonderful man. That elfin dancer, that sweet, graceful, lady-like child—she isn't quite like that, really. No. And that other dancer, that abandoned-looking hussy at whose name young men grin sheepishly and old men grow purple and snort—if you talk to people like E., you will discover that she is the ally of every underdog in the company, the self-appointed defender of all in danger or disgrace. From his place in the chorus, E. has made a study of "stars" and their little ways, from the haughty star, through intermediate varieties, to the tiresomely affable star.

"And what," I asked, "about the star you have to lift over your head and carry upside down from the stage at the end of her number?"

"It all depends. It's easy enough if she's really a dancer who has merely had to speak a couple of verses by way of introduction to her turn. But if she's really a singer, who has had a dance tacked on to her song—" He smiled ruminatively.

* * * *

So when you're next at the theatre, after you've wheezed your well-fed way to C 9 and 10—of course, I'm merely showing you what you look like from the stage; I know very well you've only had a bite, and aren't so very late—

"Excuse me! I beg your pardon, madam.
Was that your foot? Yes, dear, 9 and 10."

"There's somebody in them!"

"No!"

"My dear boy, there is! Ask to see their
tickets."

"Well—er—are you sure this is Row C?"

"You said it was."

"No, I didn't, darling. I followed you.
I thought you'd——"

"If you want to have a row, at least wait
till we're in our proper seats."

"I don't—— Excuse me. Oh, I *beg* your
pardon. Mind that lady's foot, sweetheart."

—and have found your seats, and decided whether the theatre is stuffy or draughty, or both, and taken off your coats and wraps and put them on again, you might have a look at the gentlemen of the chorus and see them as they are, these lucky ones in a West End show, the men with public-school educations and war records having a rollicking time on £4 a week. If they aren't absolutely your ideal of the Hon. Derek and Lord Cyril, don't be too fearfully killing in your comments. Let it go.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PUGILIST

WE might begin with Olympia, or the circular Albert Hall, or that odd sedecagonal building in the Blackfriars Road, the Ring. We could have vivid lights, a sea of faces, the bluish haze of cigar smoke, the shrill, hysterical laugh of a woman, the gleaming limbs of the combatants. You would have a breathless pen-picture of a fistic encounter, and I should rid my system, for years and years to come, of its store of clichés and mixed metaphors.

It is very tempting. All the same, we will, if you don't mind, abjure these delights, conserve your nervous force and my adjectives, and pay a visit to a little street in Bermondsey. It might be a little street in Hoxton or Deptford, but it happens to be in Bermondsey. The short, sturdy man living there with his wife and children might be a furniture-remover or a sailor, but he happens to be a stevedore. And he might have been a steady, hard-working stevedore all his life if he hadn't been, for twenty years, a steady, hard-working boxer. There's such a lot of luck, you see, in these matters.

For instance, if he had been born ten years

later he might now be scratch at golf and the owner of a villa at Hollywood. If—

“ Only,” he growls, in his husky voice, “ I wasn’t.”

* * * *

No. He doesn’t rail against fate, or the public, or against anything. If he was unlucky in not being born ten years later, he was lucky in not being born ten years earlier. That’s how he looks at it. He has learned not to waste his breath in questioning the referee’s decisions.

When, after a little sparring with his brother in the backyard, he went in for his first competition at the age of sixteen and a half, at Wonderland, and was beaten in the second heat, he received 13s. (To some of the older boxers, who in their youth had been glad to earn half-a-crown a night, this seemed a sinful waste of money.) In his next competition, at Deptford, he won outright, succeeding in all four heats, and being rewarded with thirty shillings.

* * * *

There occurred, in one of these early competitions, an incident apparently trifling, but durable in its effect, and very characteristic of the boxing profession. Hitherto our young pugilist had fought under his own name—Charlie Wood. But on this evening one of the boy competitors, not fancying the look of his opponent,

withdrew his entry, and Charlie Wood, picking up his card, took his place and his title. As Young Nipper he fought and won, and as Young Nipper of Bermondsey he was known for over twenty years by hundreds who never heard his real name and thousands who never saw him.

"Yes," I said, when I first heard the story, "but what about the lad whose name you took? What about the real Young Nipper?"

"Him? Oh, he was very pleased. Told all his friends he'd won the competition. Told 'em he wasn't going to fight any more, in case they wanted to come and see him next time. No, he never made any trouble about the name."

Why Charlie Wood, or the public, should prefer these fancy names neither he, nor the public, can explain. Occasionally a Jimmy Wilde goes through life as his godparents intended, but as a rule the English boxer prefers to sacrifice, or at least to disguise, this piece of his personality. Perhaps, by presenting himself to the public with a nickname ready-made, he wishes to suggest that he has a crowd of supporters who, from sheer love and admiration, have rechristened him Kid, or Boy, or Tiger. But I don't believe there is anything more subtle than a childish love of dressing-up at the bottom of this habit. For even the apparently genuine names are often inventions. Take Bill Tracey of Bermondsey, another pugilist known to followers of the sport—he sounds real enough. But he isn't. His name is Wood, and he's Young Nipper's brother.

Pseudonyms hold psychological depths not yet fully sounded. There are many reasons—especially the lack of recognition accorded to me by other eminent psychologists—why I will not stop to plumb them now. But, apart from the suggestion of youth and nippiness in a name like Young Nipper, there is surely mystery and stimulus in a double personality. Not everyone, I know, will respond to the stimulus or enjoy the mystery. There are many people for whom the complications of such an existence would be merely embarrassing, who would find in such a complete change nothing but confusion, fatigue and waste. But there are others who know what it is to be weary of their surroundings and their often mythical devotees, who long for an alternative existence where, under a new name and in a different society, they could fill an entirely fresh rôle. The amusing thing is that boxers are not, as a rule, of their number.

But if it is probable that considerations of this nature played a very subsidiary part in the decision of Charlie Wood to adopt Young Nipper as a ring-name, yet he was powerless to dodge the consequences of his action. For twenty years he became two widely distinct persons. Part of his time he was Young Nipper of Bermondsey. In 1911 he was beaten on points by Georges Carpentier in an eight-round contest. Then he knocked out Johnny Basham in five rounds at the Liverpool Stadium. Then he fought Freddie Welsh for twenty rounds, and was beaten on

points. And so on. He can go on like this all night, for his memory is prodigious, and he carries in his head the names of opponents, referees, and places of meeting, the weights, number of rounds, verdicts, amount of prizes, and general course of events, including dates of (so it seems) all the 500 odd fights in which he has taken part. On only two occasions has he "taken the count," and as, in a large proportion of his fights, he, a light-weight, was opposing welter-weights, the record denotes marvellous toughness and powers of endurance. In fact, quite a "white hope," you see; a dashing figure, a favourite shrewdly watched by West-End swells who know all about boxing, even though they themselves never fought anything fiercer than a cold in the head.

Such is, or was, Young Nipper; and as you listen bemusedly to the innumerable precise details of his full career, you might be pardoned for thinking that you are hearing the story of a whole life. It was, I remember, almost, though not quite, by chance that I discovered that, apart from a short trip to Australia and an occasional encounter at provincial rings like the Liverpool Stadium, he had hardly ever left Bermondsey. Sometimes he has journeyed, professionally or semi-professionally, as far as Deptford, Hoxton or Whitechapel. But in Bermondsey he was born, has lived, and will be content to die in the end. I shall have more to say presently about the extreme narrowness of the

life of a boxer, even a successful boxer. But that reference to Bermondsey was evidently a cue. Here comes a new character.

* * * *

Enter Mr. C. Wood. He is a short, thick-set, fair-haired man, with square shoulders and face. The bridge of his nose is unusually broad, as if, while the clay was still moist, the modeller's thumb had pressed too heavily there. His left eyebrow, deeply scarred, seems to have been cut open more than once, and something has damaged the natural curves of his left ear. His right eyebrow and his right ear, if you look closely, have also suffered, though not to the extent of their fellows. Below his lips there is an old mark, long healed, as if a tooth had been forced through the flesh. You wonder which tooth, and then you notice that the top teeth seem to be missing. His right hand, too, has a queer, irregular look. He sees your eyes dwelling on it, and explains that he broke it against Freddie Welsh's head. Or was it when, in the sixth round, he smashed the hip-bone of Arthur Warner of Bethnal Green? He knows, of course; but it is difficult for the listener to remember, because the conversation, at this turn, passes swiftly through a maze of statistics, from Freddie Welsh's head to Arthur Warner's hip, and from Arthur Warner's weight and record to the crumpled ribs of Corporal Baker, light-weight

champion of the Army and Navy for four years running.

"Yes. It was the Army that finished me, really. Living under canvas in the wet weather. I wasn't used to roughing it, you see."

While you are considering this last admission of the hero of 500 fights, I must puzzle out how it is that, when I describe Young Nipper, he turns into Charlie Wood, and when I introduce Mr. C. Wood, he insists on talking boxing.

* * * *

"What I notice about these new men," he remarks, gently caressing his right hand, "is that they haven't got a punch. They stroke one another. Jimmy Wilde had a punch, and Jack Johnson—there was a lovely fighter! And a nice fellow, too. He was very badly treated, I reckon. But So-and-so," mentioning a public idol, "he's what I call a drawing-room boxer. Very skilful, and a nice fellow, but no punch. Have you seen him on the films?" he went on, without a trace of irony. "He's a beautiful actor."

"In your boyhood, were the championships almost invariably held by foreigners, as now?"

"Generally. That's about the only thing that hasn't changed. When I was a boy, meetings would be held in the garden or courtyard of a private house, covered in for the occasion. And, of course, women hardly ever came. Mr. Dick Burge didn't like to see 'em. Now they're nearly

as numerous as the men, especially when a Dutchman's fighting. Dutch women seem to like it. Then there's the big money ; and that, I suppose, is the cause of so much more training. When I started, they used to call us out of the pub, when it was our turn to appear. I always smoked and drank beer. I've given that up, though, now it doesn't matter!"

" Didn't you do any training ? "

" Oh, yes. Roadwork, and practising with my brother and pals. We had a chap heavier than ourselves for hitting ; and another, lighter than ourselves, to keep us quick. That was about all. But I was very lucky in having a brother who was a wonderful judge of boxing. He always acted as my chief second, and I always took his advice. I remember once, when I was fighting a Frenchman, my brother saying to me at the end of the sixteenth round, ' When are you going to begin ? ' ' I'm winning easy,' I said. ' You've lost every round,' he said. ' Go on ! ' I said. ' Every round,' he said. ' Lumme ! ' I said, and gave the Frenchie the knock-out in the eighteenth round."

* * * *

Surely there are no men as much in the eye of the sporting public as these heroes of the ring, big and little, who yet live (or should I say, lived ?) in so narrow a circle. They were known to half England ; they knew none but one another. Possibly the boxers of the younger

generation, with the poets, the K.C.'s, the actresses, the dukes, the jockeys, the newspaper proprietors, the Cabinet Ministers, and the bankrupts, tour in one vast celebrated party the night clubs, the receptions, and other meeting places of the paragraphed. It wasn't so twenty years ago. Young Nipper's generation had neither the money nor the opportunities for such delights. They lived, and still live, in their own districts, where, too old for the ring but still young for most purposes, they follow one or other of the arduous professions reserved for the strong and needy. They hang together, and many of them who, like Young Nipper, have never put on a glove since their retirement, and never mean to, still crowd to every ringside to watch, to criticise, to compare. Often, besides the professional bond, there is a family bond between them, by birth or marriage. Young Nipper's father, for instance, himself no boxer, came of a fighting stock, and Young Nipper's son may one day—but his mother will have a voice in that. Young Nipper, in spite of being born ten years too early, doesn't make as much as a stevedore as he made as a boxer. Yet his wife, like the wife of many another public man, is heartily glad he's out of it.

CHAPTER XX

THE FILM MAKERS

"YES," said the producer suddenly, breaking off a whispered conversation with one of the electricians. "And now we'll do a full length. A little more gesture for this, you know. And mind your feet."

He placed the actor and actress in position, ran out a tape measure from the camera to the crown of the lady's head, and then, bending down, marked with a piece of chalk the position of her feet on the floor. He returned to the camera and nodded briefly. An assistant blew a whistle ; dazzling, vicious-looking lights leaped up, around, and above ; and a young man hurried into the illuminated semicircle and held a board in front of the lady's face.

"Mr. S— H—," it read. "Scene 195 b.
F 252. Amber take 1."

The camera man gave his handle a couple of turns, and the young man and his board regained the outer darkness, having served their purpose. The forthcoming exposures were now prefaced or labelled with the name of the producer, the number of the scene and of the film, and rid of

any likelihood of confusion during the stages of developing, printing and assembling.

Everything is now ready for the "shooting."

* * * *

The scene, very charming and Oriental, is the interior of a European's bungalow in China. The famous actor, in a gorgeous Chinese robe, has temporarily vanished in the wake of the young man with the board, and the living-room is occupied solely by the girl. Evidently it is night-time, for she wears a mauve evening gown. And what a night! She crouches in terror against the wall, her eyes fixed on the front door, which shakes and splinters beneath crashing blows delivered from without. It is only a question of time, and the door bursts inwards, revealing three coolies armed with hatchets. They stand aside, cringing, and the terrible Mandarin enters. You'd guess he was a dirty dog even if he'd rung the bell in the ordinary way. He advances slowly on the girl, who retreats, wild-eyed, before him. She seems hypnotised by — Whistle! The players stop, and turn inquiringly towards the camera.

"Too far, Jenny," says the producer. "Count your steps."

She looks at her feet. We all stare at her feet. It is true. Her toes are just past the chalk-line.

"Sorry!" she remarks.

"Right-oh! We'll do that again. Three steps only, remember."

The Mandarin goes back to the open doorway, the girl resumes her stricken pose against the wall, the scene is repeated. Her eyes never leave her persecutor's, but this time her feet come down on the chalk lines as though they were magnets and her shoes were steel. There she awaits, at bay, the Chinaman's advance. He stands towering above her ; his lips move, and apparently he is making what dear, old-fashioned things still call a " hideous " suggestion. His eyes are mere slits. Their wicked, narrow glint would scare anyone. But this is an English girl.

" You ! " she rallies desperately. " You beast ! You—you savage ! "

It seems an odd word to use to a Mandarin, but evidently she understands the yellow races. An indescribable change takes place in him. His mask falls for an instant, and we see the proud, crafty, merciless Oriental. Then his eyes disappear completely, his relentless mouth closes like a trap.

" S-s-avag-g-ge ! " he hisses, thrusting his face menacingly into hers.

" Hold that ! " shrieks the producer. " Hold it ! Hold it ! "

The Mandarin holds it. Her eyes sick with fear and loathing, " Jenny " holds it, too. I even have a sort of dim idea I'm holding it myself. I couldn't move if I tried. At last, after what seems eternity, the Mandarin straightens himself, turns, and leaves—a purposeful, menacing exit. You can see that he hasn't gone

for good, in any sense of the term. There's going to be more of him, you feel. Still, the immediate danger is past, and the girl turns her face to the camera, registering collapse. Poor child, she is utterly unstrung—and can you wonder? Her mouth trembles, her—

"Mental strain!" shouts the producer. "Not too physical. Steady with that lip."

Her lip stiffens—very effectively done that. Next instant the assistant blows his whistle, the camera man takes his hand off the handle, an electrician turns the lights off with a bang.

"Good!" says the producer, and everybody smiles.

* * * *

A short interval. The producer talks vigorously with the camera man, while in another corner the Mandarin and his victim split a joke. It sounds like a good one. . . . The lady has an exceptionally musical laugh. Really a most delightful laugh. And none of her "fans" will ever hear it. It seems a pity.

Her face, unlike that of a stage actress, is not blotchy with unnatural colours now that the lights are down. In fact, unless you were sitting beside her you might easily imagine she was not made up at all. She looks pale, and seems to have omitted to use the lip-stick. A little powder, you'd say, no more.

Actually, her face is made up, and very heavily; but for the studio, not for the stage.

Anyone who shows his normal face to the foot-lights appears pale and ghastly as a corpse. (You will have seen authors taking a "call," and wondered why they must make speeches instead of hurrying back to their death-beds.) Anyone who attempted to play in a picture with his complexion untouched would, on the contrary, come out black. Consequently, the two professions demand widely opposed methods of preparation. A stage actor deepens and ensanguines his hue, a film actor lightens his till it is a very pale bluish-pink, just on the mauve side of white. (Dead white is to be avoided, and even shirt fronts and tennis flannels are the better for being slightly tinted. Similarly, the girl wore a rope of misty pink beads instead of pearls.) The lips, like the face, have a thick coating, and are given the mushroom-mauve shade seen on the mouths of delicate children. Only in the treatment of the eyes is there any relation to theatrical methods, and even here the effect, seen close to, is less heavy. The blacks and blues are used more sparingly.

So they appeared to me—the persecuted heroine in China, Sir William Hamilton, a vamp, Nelson, and the numerous other people who joined me, from time to time, in the outer darkness. I had heard my more experienced acquaintances enlarge upon the grotesqueness of the make-up required for the screen. I can only say that, to my eye, the appearance of those playing "white" parts—European or American—was

far nearer the normal than it would have been in a stage production. Of those *bizarre* effects which are the commonplaces of theatrical dressing-rooms, I saw but one—splotches of green on the cheeks and beneath the chin of an actor whose face was too full for the lean, cadaverous and fragile character he had to represent.

If I noticed anything odd in the appearance of the players, it was not in their make-up, but in themselves. Some of them had a hard, knowing, almost a cruel expression in their eyes. This would disappear as soon as the lights were turned down, when their eyes would regain the usual friendly, pleasant look. In spite of muslin veils over the lights, and other devices to mitigate their fierceness, the glare remains, and must remain if the photography is to be successful. Some people get used to, or are untroubled by, or invent ways of ignoring it. Others never grow entirely accustomed to it. They seem unable to avoid a slight contraction of the lids, and this is enough to give to the most affable of faces a cold and hostile expression.

* * * *

The girl, the Mandarin, and the broken door are tucked away in a corner of an enormous building known as the Stoll Studios. Five, six, seven—I don't know how many—films can be, and are, produced there simultaneously. You can leave China, and if you don't mind the dread of knocking something over, stroll through close

THE FILM MAKERS: "SHOOTING"



forests of pillars and porticoes and endless stray "sets" and "props," into almost any world or century you choose. Just round the corner, so near that courtly gentlemen in knee breeches can hobnob with our coolies, you will see Lord Nelson and his Emma. You won't see much of them—just a short scene, like that of the discomfited Mandarin, played over and over again—long shot, close up, camera moved to right, camera moved to left. Sometimes, of course, it is possible to take several different views simultaneously. But often there are technical difficulties in the way of this.

For instance, the Mandarin and the girl spent the entire morning on the scene I have described—he advancing, she retreating, till they reached the point where they "held" it. It had, of course, been rehearsed already. I am talking of the taking only. A dozen times he made his "hideous" suggestion, a dozen times she called him "Savage!" a dozen times he showed his objection to that term. Again and again and again they went through it, ringed round with livid light, isolated as Brünhilde, except for the little gap where stood the producer and the camera man and the camera. No wonder films are expensive to make. This one had been in process of manufacture since Christmas, three months ago. Some of it was taken in Nice, which won't make it any cheaper. For when, in the course of construction, a picture travels, a good many people have to travel with it. I

have mentioned the Chinaman, the coolies, the English girl, the producer, and his camera men—he has one or two of these who always work with him—and the man who blows the whistle and holds up the board. I haven't mentioned the rest of the cast, or the man in charge of the "book" or scenario, or the electricians fringing the scene with their large brackets, or manipulating spot lights from above. In addition, there were "property" men, a few stray hands I couldn't identify, and—I mustn't forget to allude to this—a little orchestra, consisting of a pianist and a fiddler, who, in their task of orientalising the atmosphere, dealt faithfully with Amy Woodforde-Finden.

* * * *

Another short interval comes and goes. The lady uses it to slip into a yellow wrap and repair her complexion. The Mandarin makes faces to himself, stretches his muscles after their long spell of Asiatic impassivity. Then, for the last time, his menials batter down the door; for the last time she collects her faltering strength, faces him, and impugns his Celestial culture. Two cameras, at slightly different angles, are taking this picture, the last to be made in these surroundings. The "set" will be left standing until to-morrow, when to-day's exposures will be shown. If they are satisfactory, the set will then be dismantled for good. All the scenes in which it appears have now been filmed, and

already the art producer, a few yards away, is putting the finishing touches to the *décor* next to be used. A story is not filmed consecutively, as a play is (sometimes) rehearsed. When once a set is in position, the various episodes to which it serves as background are acted, and taken, irrespective of the sequence of events, until, after the last one is completed, a move can be made to another set, and all work concentrated there for a week or a month, as the case may be. It is easy to understand what an economy of space is secured in this way.

Economy, yes. It is in economy of the right kind that the hopes of English films must lie, and it was encouraging to note that this seemed to be generally recognised in the studios. There was no sign of stupid economy over "effects," but there were plenty of signs of sensible economy in the rapid turning off of lights during the pauses, and in the careful rehearsals and instructions which preceded each "take," and minimised the waste of film and current. The great men in Los Angeles have a long start, a wonderful climate, and most of the advantages that are going. But their methods are extravagant, their costs enormous. Here is the vulnerable spot in their almost impregnable position.

CHAPTER XXI

THE INTERVIEWER

IN the course of my tour of the more curious and picturesque professions, it was once or twice suggested to me that my own job was as odd as any. It may be so. Routine is the chief ingredient of almost all occupations, yet every man believes that its sickening flavour is strongest in his particular dish. If I have learned anything during the past weeks, it is that we are all, turn and turn about, one another's public. That is why, not without misgiving, I tack on to the workers' serial a final episode, *The Parasitic Interviewer*. Featuring myself.

* * * *

Interviews are of many kinds. There is the Political Election interview, at which the candidate quotes the more resounding passages of his "Letter to My Constituents," gives a few examples of the unsportsmanlike behaviour of his opponent, and then hurries away to address a crowded meeting. There is the quayside interview, at which the foreign *impresario*, setting foot in England for the first time, is good enough to disclose his views on the London stage. Although, as I know from my own experience,

these and such other interviews may easily be mishandled, nevertheless I place them at the bottom of the scale. They come nearer to reporting, and crude reporting at that. They depend, for their interest, upon news value—the prominence of the person interviewed, the force of his remarks. At the other end of the scale comes creative writing, such as is to be found in the late William Archer's *Real Conversations*, which, though published over twenty years ago and dealing with matters then topical, still provide excellent reading to-day. In the present chapter, the word interview is meant to indicate a meeting and its description, to which the interviewer contributes something by means of his eyes, his impressions, his powers of summing up.



After the direction and scope of the interview have been decided, after a good many inquiries over the telephone or on flat feet in order to discover who is the best man for my purpose, and if, and when, and where he can be seen, an appointment is made. Assuming a manner in which the dignity of the Press and an appreciation of the promised facilities are happily blended, I set off. What is my equipment? A pencil, a sheet of paper (or preferably two or three correspondence cards), a receptive frame of mind, and a good memory for people's remarks—their actual words, and the order in which

they are placed. Note that this is all I've got—not all I want. I should like keener powers of observation, a knack of dropping into mid-fellowship with strangers and of making them do the same with me, and a readier flow of small talk whereby shy and suspicious folk might be put at their ease. An interviewer must know how to listen, but he must also know how to talk. I have proved that there are people in existence, even nowadays, who have never been interviewed before. If the best subjects of all are to be found among their number, so are the worst—print-shy folk, terrified of their friends, of Fleet Street, of me. They have to be talked into talking, to be bombarded with suggestions. Very often the worst suggestions are the best. A sensible question gives them the chance of saying merely yes or no—the chance they are looking for, the chance they never miss. A deliberately idiotic question, betraying a profound misconception of their lives, will frequently set them off, and reveal them, to their own admiring gaze, as the holders of definite and interesting opinions.

There are others, again, who, lacking imagination, cannot conceive that their calling is not an open book to all. They are struck dumb by my denseness, and I have to copy M. Jourdain and pretend that I know Latin thoroughly, while begging them to proceed as if I didn't understand a word. I seldom take notes during conversation, because that practice is apt to produce

self-consciousness in the speaker. Neither do I invent or polish up remarks. I don't consider that playing the game. Besides, you would easily detect the polish, and be annoyed at the fraud. Only once, in the case of a very recalcitrant subject, and after the most absurd suggestions had failed to tempt him, did I have to thrust into the mouth of another a selection of answers to my own questions. The interview was not a success—and it ought to have been one of the best. That was why I went on with it. I should have done wiser to throw him away—but he was a rare bird, and I had taken a lot of trouble to get him.



I arrive. What then? How do I start? Very often I don't have to, beyond securing my immediate impressions with a mental pin. For this purpose, the first few minutes, or even seconds, are priceless, and must on no account be squandered, since never again throughout the interview is one quite so sensitive to what is new. Before the violent assault of the new influences, the old influences seem to fly into hiding. If you are to do justice to your subject, you must leave go of your usual standards, leave go of all those ready-made aids to measurement. A change begins, subtle at first, but growing until the interview is ended and the interviewer steps back into the street—an engine-driver, a film producer, anything except a journalist.

But whether I have to start or not, I have a list of questions ; simple questions, generally the first ones to occur to me, in the hope that they will also be the natural questions of my readers. Before the end, I consult this list, and if there is any of the questions which I am still unable to answer, I put it. Question and answer, short question and long answer, these, of course, are the bare bones of interviewing, which the subsequent article is to clothe. If you look back through the preceding paragraphs you will see several of these bare bones. I have left them sticking out—gaunt, undraped, hideous—specially for you. On second thoughts, you needn't look back. There's another bone just coming.

How have I been, generally, received ? Very politely, save in one instance, and even there the lack of cordiality was due, I believe, to the indiscretion of another journalist who had preceded me some years before. Considering that (except in cases where the idea of publicity, even though uncensored, was thought to be of commercial value) I was wanting something for nothing, the trouble which people were willing to take on my behalf was remarkable. My explanation of this kindness is, simply, that Londoners are kind. Perhaps I provided a little change from the daily routine. But in that case, I should surely have been an object of interest. Looking back, I am struck by the lack of curiosity shown about my side of the combination.

Parisians, though they might not have been so kind, would certainly have been more inquisitive. Very few questioned me about myself or the other pictures in the gallery where they were to hang—as far as I remember, nobody but the racing motorist, the river pilot, and, of course, the two mannequins of Hanover Square. That “of course” is, I suppose, a tribute to the subtlety of those psychological devils, the novelists. Is it an instinctive and often quite unconscious coquetry that causes a woman to make a man talk about himself? Or is it a greater curiosity about her fellow mortals? Whatever the explanation, the fact remains that the only occasion on which I interviewed members of the other sex was also the only occasion on which I was definitely side-tracked. She was a London mannequin, born on the shore of the Black Sea. For exotic interest, it seemed an ideal blend, and never have my purely professional hopes stood higher. Moreover, the interview seemed to proceed *à merveille*. It was only when I reached home and began to sort my material that I noticed that, very beautifully, quietly, and completely, I had myself been interviewed.

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The recollection of this experience makes me wonder whether it is possible to formulate the ideal qualities to be looked for in the person interviewed. I don’t believe it is. As soon as I think of a desirable quality, like enthusiasm,

cases come to mind where the very absence of that quality has had a characteristic and even dramatic value for me. It is possible, however, to give a few concrete examples of bad and good subjects. The worst subject of all is the man who insists on regarding an interview as something which, if he is careful and all goes well, will redound to his credit, a glorified free advertisement ; and me as a caricaturist, whose malicious eye hunts for the flaws, which will subsequently be held up to the ridicule of the town. In short, he suffers from vanity, and the suspicious caution of the vain. I suppose it is hardly necessary for me to point out that he gets no advertisement. He doesn't even get the little publicity he might, because his falseness makes him too brittle to work on. He crumbles to pieces in the writer's hand, and the public, finding the result a trifle dusty, coughs, and turns over the page.

Another poor subject is the man so bound round with his profession that he even thinks in jargon, and has lost his heritage of English. I fancied this to be the mark of a second-rate intellect ; I still think so, but I must admit that some extremely competent men suffer from this inability to explain.

These—the man who censors his thoughts until there's nothing left, the man who finds a genuine difficulty in realising that large vehicular automata are, often, merely 'buses, and the tongue-tied man, to whom I alluded earlier—are

the three types, in order of demerit, I pray not to encounter. The good subject is even harder to formulate, but just as easy to recognise. In the recent series, the best one I met, taking all in all, was one of the mannequins—not the gentle Cossack who turned the tables on me so neatly, but a girl from North London. She had almost every quality which, as an interviewer, I prize. She was very intelligent, and in addition to knowing her job from A to Z from within, she had a clear perception of what it must look like from the outside. She was quick to understand the implications of any question, and her answers were full and strictly pertinent. Perhaps because she was herself a working girl and knew how troublesome clients may be, she realised that interviewing was my trade, and did me the service of wasting no time. When, in pursuance of my usual custom of extracting information I don't mean to use, I questioned her upon some details of a mannequin's life too delicate for publication, she gave the answers perfectly—without resentment, hesitation, or coyness. From my point of view she was flawless. From the point of view of her own profession—well, the fat, the would-be young, the scraggy, and all the other comic ladies, must be wonderfully complacent if they can bare their souls and their bodies, day after day, in front of those devastatingly keen eyes.

* * * *

I have just said, I like, if possible, to obtain

more information than I can ever use. This surplus is like the background of a picture, or the bass in music ; or, better, it is like the dregs in Turkish coffee, something which I don't ask you to consume, but is necessary if I am to give you the flavour. I dislike working without this surplus to lean upon. In fact, when I come away from an interview with precisely what I want and no more, I know that the result will be unsatisfactory to me. Whether it will be unsatisfactory to you, only you can tell. Whether it will be unsatisfactory to the subject, neither you nor I can guess. His point of view is equally far from both of us.

CHAPTER XXII

SOHO

IF we are going to look in on the foreign colonies of London, we must start with Soho. You may think it hackneyed. I thought so myself, and my first intention was to leave Soho to the last. But I changed my mind for two reasons. First, the longer I looked at Soho the more convinced I became that a district containing so many conflicting elements was not, and never could be, hackneyed, because it could never be really known. Secondly, the longer I listened to Soho, the more clearly it took on the form of an overture, where the attentive ear may catch the *motifs* which will be developed subsequently, and in their own separate contexts. It is, more than any other, the foreign quarter of London, and it is characteristic of its medley that it has no central point. Old Compton Street, Soho Square and the Marlborough Street Police Station—I suppose they all have claims, prosperous, dignified, or grim, to be considered the heart of the neighbourhood. But if we must have a central point (which I am disposed to deny), let it be Wardour Street—that thoroughfare which, so typical in its vicissitudes of life in Soho, starts full of promise and glitter, grows gently lurid and

fly-blown as it goes north, tries to pull itself together in passing a church, is quickly in straitened circumstances, decides that religion doesn't pay, tries its hand at film work, gives itself over to frocks and hats in a feverish attempt to be smart before it is too late, and then, just when it looks like going to the dogs, makes a surprisingly solid and comfortable finish with the Kosher Restaurant. If we take the street from north to south instead of south to north, starting with a good steady business connection and ending in Leicester Square, it will be equally typical of Soho. Almost anything is typical of this topsy-turvy quarter.



I said that Soho could never be known. In spite of the enormous publicity it has received during the past twenty years, it remains as remote as ever, so varied that a man might spend his life in it and die before he had finished exploring it, socially and topographically. All the nations are to be found there. They have been divided up against their will by the difficulties of accommodation, with the result that Greeks, French, Italians, Swiss, Portuguese, and Turks share the same streets, and even the same houses. But they have refused to be broken up in spirit or sympathies ; and they live the most domesticated of all Londoners amid the restricted society of their families and a few, a very few, intimate friends. Even business acquaintances will pene-

trate no further than the shop. In Soho the home has still an inviolability quite usual on the continent, but unknown in England. The inner lives of the little tradespeople who form the solid body of the district are so hard to know as to be almost unknowable. The real Soho is an agglomeration of self-contained social units forming a self-contained quarter. Amid and untouched by its utterly disproportionate share of the restaurants and night-clubs of the metropolis, Soho works every day, all day, and most of the night. It is the most industrious quarter in London, where revellers, walking in the small hours through a world suddenly turned stale and unprofitable, will see on many a glowing window-blind the shadow of a woman sewing, of a man bending over his accounts.

* * * *

And yet, somehow or other, they are all linked up, the idlers and the workers, in the same way as the tourist is an integral part of Montmartre. Allowing for the necessary differences, this is London's Montmartre, where the native Londoner is a foreigner, and is exploited as such, and where the quiet, hard-working resident supplies the food, the drink, the clothing, the whole paraphernalia of amusement. But that is not to suggest that Soho is sham or meretricious. In fact, where Soho is concerned, almost any suggestion is an error which one immediately wishes to correct. The sophisticated people,

especially gourmets, who are apt to profess that they have "finished" with Soho and its restaurants, do not always know that the great culinary artists, the *chefs* and the *maîtres-d'hôtel* of the fashionable boulevards, have their own pet restaurant here in the quarter where so many of them began their careers ; and you can see them, if you know the place, grumbling at the food, being mollified by the waiters, declaring that the *cuisine* is not what it was, and in short, behaving and being treated exactly like you and me.

Again, if you know the place, you can turn in at an open front-door, squeezed in between a *delicatessen* shop and the harmless old-fashioned obscenities of a continental newsagent, and make your way down a narrow corridor to a lady's bedroom at the end of it. So far from being offended, she will welcome you gladly if you possess two qualifications : you must speak French and you must want coffee. It is from this highly respectable Frenchwoman in her highly respectable bedroom that the best coffee in London is to be obtained. (If you doubt my word, think of the restaurant which first introduced, and still introduces, Londoners to really good coffee, and then go and ask the *maître-d'hôtel* of that restaurant where you can buy it.) There are fifty "right places" like this tucked away all over Soho, and though you may know forty of them, you are always liable to come upon a Rolls-Royce limousine in a side alley waiting outside a house

you have never before noticed, but famous all the same for olives, or wine, or tailoring, or *petits pois*, or bread, or macaroni, or heaven knows what.

The other residents may envy these specialists their *clientèle*; they don't patronise them, preferring to do their shopping in the open-air markets in Rupert Street and Little Pulteney Street, where you can buy meat, fish, vegetables, fruit, flowers, even delphinium seedlings if you are so disposed ; or in Berwick Street, where you can buy anything, but above all, beyond all, most of all and especially, pink silk stockings. There is something tremendous about these piles. All the stockings are cheap, but some of them are manufactured from the most expensive silk procurable. They are laddered stock, banished from Bond Street. You needn't think, though, to find any bargains among them. Hundreds of curly-headed girls will have been there before you, and snapped up the pairs whose blemish came above the knee. . . .



Every language in the civilised world is spoken beside the stalls in Berwick Street, but there are pubs and cafés where you will hear only one language spoken, and that not English. When a tradesman ventures from his shop, his reckless mood takes him to a house of refreshment sacred to his compatriots. The Italians, the Spaniards, the Greeks—they have their own saloons ; yes,

and so do the Chinese, in a little court hard to find even when you know it ; and so do the niggers at the Seven Dials end. Except, perhaps, for an interest in horse-racing, these foreigners have learned, and wish to learn, nothing from the English. An Englishman may enter their pubs and cafés, but he will be made to realise—probably without rudeness—that he is not wanted.

There are other cafés where the visitor will find himself even less welcome, where a hush, a rather disquieting hush, will mark his entry and last throughout his stay. These are the cafés, generally labelled “Open all night,” where the boys forgather. The boys are not always residents of Soho. They congregate here because it is fairly cheap, and because, more important still, it is in the heart of the rich and juicy West End. They provide the sinister element of Soho, and most of the “trouble” which the district knows comes from them.

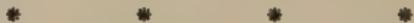
In the Café des Conspirateurs (let us call it), in a bare, gas-lit room littered with decrepit tables and chairs, cigarette ends, matches, orange skins, crumbs, squashed chips, paper bags, torn-up correspondence, and rolled-up newspapers, the boys lean confidentially towards one another, talking out of the corners of their mouths. What are they exactly ? Whatever they may be, they are nothing exactly. They’re not exactly stupid, and they’re not exactly clever. They wouldn’t exactly go back on a pal, and they’re not incor-

ruptible either—not exactly. In a way, they've never had a chance, and in another way, they couldn't take one if it came. Some aren't even boys, and will never see fifty again. Some have their pockets full of Treasury notes, and you can guess what they are, though you won't always guess exactly right. Some have nothing but a frayed suit and an anxious, harassed look. Most of them, although passionately preferring not to talk about themselves, would, under pressure, describe themselves as waiters. They aren't waiters—not exactly. That is to say, they have been waiters once—at least, sort of waiters. Oh well, shall we leave this bit? They haven't exactly got a job now. There was some trouble, you see. . . . Yes, I'm afraid it's rather a vague story. Possibly the police could give you some painfully exact information about them. But, although some of the boys didn't believe it, I am not a policeman.

* * * *

With the boys—or never far away—are the equally enigmatic girls. They swarm in Soho. Outside every dressmaker's a young Jewess, with thick, black hair, stands like an Oriental tout waiting to drag customers into the shop. In every pub, girls. In every café, girls. In the streets and at the street corners, countless girls. Smart, ragged, middle-aged, and young, they are all acquainted, and greet one another by Christian name. (In this world of half-lights and half-o

truths surnames are only confided to intimate friends.) Like the boys, the girls come from every part of London. Soho itself couldn't possibly support them all, and indeed, they don't come to be supported. This is their club, a place for meetings, news, free wireless concerts, and, with luck, refreshment. News travels fast between these shifting groups. Everybody knows mysteriously, and in a moment, that we can't go to Jimmy's to-night, because Jimmy's was raided earlier in the evening. It is opening again next Monday, but as an ironmonger's, not as a coffee bar. Antonio, who ran Jimmy's, and will have to pay a fine, was moving anyhow, having taken over Isidore's place, two streets away. Isidore had a bob on King of Clubs for the Lincoln—an unlucky bet, as it cost him a tenner by the time the magistrate had finished with him. Besides, the bookie had a limit of 16 to 1. Poor Isidore is in an awful state, and Miriam has had to sell her fur coat. . . .



Those knowing cards, the boys, are familiar with the cafés and the pubs and the plain-clothes men, but they don't know any more about the shopkeepers than the shopkeepers know about them. The girls can beat them both at this ; I am inclined to believe they beat anybody. Drifting, they percolate everywhere, for they are preyers and victims, dressmakers and dress-buyers, housekeepers, dance-partners, drudges,

boon companions, bread-winners, and a dozen other things, all in one. They come and go where they will, and nobody minds them, nobody notices them. They are free of the whole, vast, complicated warren. If, after searching for a year, you were to find one who wasn't stupid, or inarticulate, or suspicious, or fearful of the consequences, or a natural liar, you might learn a lot. You might get a picture of Soho which really was complete. But you would have to be careful not to find two, because then you'd get two pictures, both complete, and both completely at variance with the other. I hope this won't make you smile too cynically at my imaginary witnesses, for that's what the police-court solicitors do. I would rather you reflected on the possibility that the precise truth about Soho is non-existent. Of all the London quarters, it is the most industrious and the idlest, the most domesticated and the most immoral, the most unchanging and the most fluctuating, the most mixed and the most watertight.

CHAPTER XXIII

LIMEHOUSE

SCORES of people, inspired by Mr. Thomas Burke, must have paid a visit to Limehouse, and after spending an hour or two in walking about the featureless, rather empty streets, and catching sight of a few Lascars in raincoats entering a Home for Sailors, have come away disappointed, and convinced that Limehouse isn't what it was. It isn't.

During the past eighteen months the Chinese population has dropped from 2,000 to less than half that number, and the decrease has not only robbed the neighbourhood of some of its more picturesque characters, but is a result of successful efforts by the police to make life there a little duller. Nevertheless, the casual visitor is wrong in thinking that, because he cannot find it, "Limehouse" isn't there. There's plenty of it still, remote, mysterious, incredible. But no outsider will ever stumble on it, even by accident. The most he can hope for, the nearest he will ever get to it, is to have his pocket picked while mounting a L.C.C. tram in the West India Dock Road.



You might walk all the way down a narrow,

rickety street called Pennyfields, and never guess that the occasional Chink, wandering aimlessly among the puddles, was anything but aimless, or that every light except the street lamps had not been extinguished hours ago. The windows are dark ; the doors are dark, too ; and if you gave one a push, you would, as like as not, gaze merely into a black entrance corridor. So don't give a push. The gesture, besides being useless, is liable to be resented.

The blackness of the entrance is caused by a blanket hung across the passage and completely screening the interior. Behind this blanket—or these blankets, for they hang inside many doorways, and are so greasy to touch that one gets into the way of using an elbow to lift them—will be a small packed room, and a light on a kitchen table ringed round with faces mostly yellow, occasionally black. They all turn nervously at the sound of a newcomer, and then, reassured, they bend again to the game, and the quick, persistent chattering is resumed. Such is a brief description of the characteristic scene in Penny-fields—yes, and in streets like Pennyfields in every great port the world over. The Chinaman can't live without gambling.

He has many gambling games. They vary with the premises, and he can, if he wishes, move from house to house or from room to room, changing from Chinese dice to fan-tan, or to mah-jongg, or to Chinese cards, until he finds a table where his luck is in. I won't describe the

various games. I don't fully understand all of them, and should probably fail in making you understand any. But they are notable for being extraordinarily fair ; fairer than, for example, roulette, where there is a zero working against the player ; and fairer than bridge, where there is the complication of skill or lack of it. The Chinaman leans to games of pure luck, with the chances even. His favourite, pucka-poo, goes on all day, every day, and most of the night.

* * * *

It is a strange, furtive scene, where there is no hint of the precise locality. We might as well be in Marseilles, Sydney, or Buenos Aires—anywhere, so long as berthed ships lie not far away. The old gentleman with a quill pen behind his ear who presides over the table has the universal, everlasting aspect of the East, beside which our civilisation seems new and temporary and local. He gently presides, but although excitement is apt to run high, proceedings on the whole are orderly. Don't read into the scene anything faintly resembling an orgy. There is no question here of half-drugged Orientals and female decoys. No women are present, and the men are perfectly sober. The cards, the dice, the counters give them sensations enough.

Off the gamblers' narrow street, still narrower alleys twist and double, while beneath the ramshackle old houses, with their secret connecting doors, run subterranean passages. This street

was the centre of the drug traffic. Here were the opium dens and the cocaine distributors. Was ? Were ? Well . . . yes, or nearly. If an earthquake shook down these flimsy walls, several Chinks, alone or in pairs, might no doubt be revealed, with their lamps and with the strips of rubber tubing, which they now prefer (being so much more easily secreted) to pipes. But the opium dens—as a colourist I speak regretfully—the opium dens have gone. I can't swear that there is not one left. Nobody will ever be able to swear to that as long as Limehouse is Limehouse. But neither will anyone there be able to run again one of those profitable establishments for more than a little while, and in a very small way.

The good old days of the business are over, and the dwindling of the resident Chinese population proves it. For the resident Chinks live on the visiting Chinks, the land Chink on the seafaring Chink. The yellow residents of Limehouse keep gaming houses and restaurants where yellow sailors may spend their pay. Those who, following the same simple and profitable plan, ran opium dens are the ones who have left the country, moved by a feeling of disillusionment or by an order of the court.

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But Pennyfields, in spite of its bright lamps in street and alley and the blocking up of its underground passages, remains a tortuous and sinister warren. Beyond the low-ceilinged gaming rooms,

hidden doorways lead to dark yards and hovels full of strange and often hideous histories. Most of them, even the least accessible, have been "tamed" now; that is to say, Limehouse is staggering beneath the combined weight of electric light and the attentions of the police, and is keeping very quiet.

Whether it is really dead, or merely shamming dead for the moment, remains to be seen. But it is possible to hazard one opinion. The Chinks aren't harried as long as they pay reasonable respect to the laws of England. They are, according to Limehouse standards, excellent citizens. They are also good husbands, and their English wives (there is, at this moment, only one Chinese woman in Limehouse, and she is the wife of a restaurant proprietor) are amongst the happiest and most cherished of Limehouse wives. The neighbourhood has a hectic name, but it would be a great mistake to attach all the blame for that to the quiet, inoffensive, square-dealing Chink. Too often he is the victim of our own proud island race.

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To see something of what I mean, it is only necessary to go back to the main street, to the world-famous bar at the corner. Turn in at the first door, where the proprietor sits beneath a canopy of hunting trophies and surrounded by carved ivories and curios, valuable and worthless, of all kinds. Look well at this man, for he

is known wherever sailors forgather. He, and not St. Paul's or Westminster Abbey, stands for London in the memories of men sipping strange drinks in Rio, Singapore, Valparaiso, and Shanghai. He sits in shirt-sleeves at a little table playing a game of cards with a friend—a strongly built, genial-looking man of sixty or so, with a drooping grey moustache, a ready smile, and, in spite of a comfortable absence of collar round his full neck, a faintly pontifical manner. Of men alive on the earth to-day, this is one of the best known by sight and still more by name.

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Now we will go out into the street again, and, returning through another door, inspect the scene I want to show you, the scene I was thinking of when I spoke in defence of the Chinaman—a wonderful scene, which makes me feel that I am taking part in a Eugene O'Neill play. More big-game trophies swim above our heads, but there are no carved ivories and Buddhas on side tables here. The walls of this long room are decorated at one end by a bar, and on the other three sides by the vilest crooks and prostitutes of the metropolis. You would find it hard to match this company—impossible, I should have said, but for the recollection of the niggers in Seven Dials.

Every here and there a face shines out, in the thick haze of smoke, by reason of its comparative

innocence, but it is either the face of one of the younger women which, owing to some remnant of girlishness, deceives my incurably chivalrous eye, or it is the face of some sailor, fresh from his ship and with six months' pay in his pocket, who, having strayed into this den of thieves, is obediently drinking himself stupid beneath the critical, impatient eyes of the woman beside him. Most of the sailors are foreigners, and yellow foreigners.

Generally they begin by dancing, and sometimes they end by dancing too—one last dance, supported round the room by the partners, who want to make sure just how far gone they are. A sightless pianist thumps the keys unceasingly, and every now and then one of the girls, with a little bag such as churchwardens proffer, makes the round of the room for pennies. I don't think that the pianist, oddly enough, is ever robbed. Unlike the sailors, of course, he has only a few shillings. Unlike the sailors, he will still possess a few shillings in the morning.

One last word before we move on. If your taste for realism tempts you to seek out this haunt, don't trouble to dress the part. A hundred pairs of sharp eyes will strip you of your old clothes and battered hat before you have had time to order, in your pleasantly modulated tones, a drink. There will be smarter clothes than yours—yes, and speech just as cultured. But you will be known immediately for what you are. You might as well wear your

top hat, lavender waistcoat, and spats. Better, perhaps ; for in that case you might set them guessing whether you weren't one of the swell wire-pullers behind their own crowded stage.

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I seem to have been describing the Chinaman too often as a poor sailor or as a sailor about to become poor. He is half the picture, but only half ; there are, as already stated, a good number of resident Chinese who live, and live very well, by supplying his needs. Some of these, like the keepers of gaming houses, are compelled to work secretly, though none the less profitably on that account ; others flourish openly as proprietors of restaurants—respectable, fairly respectable, and so on. Even at the respectable ones the company is not, naturally, that of Brown's or Claridge's, and you may always have the pleasure of meeting there again, after closing time, some of the quieter ladies and stronger-headed sailors from the famous bar, still carrying on in low tones the interminable conversations that never seem to end. The cooking is often excellent, and those who think that good cooking and Parisian cooking are interchangeable terms might lunch for once in the Causeway, and learn from Chang Chu the narrowness of their opinions. A word to the proprietor, an elegant young Celestial in a well-cut suit, or to Madge, the Scotch waitress, and knives and forks are willingly provided for clients unskilled in the use of the chopsticks.

Still further up the economic scale is the wealthy and influential Chinaman, the ramifications of whose strange business extend across the globe and back again. He occupies an admirable apartment, entertains you with China tea and cigars, and talks better English after you have dissipated his shyness than on your first introduction. He claims, with a resigned shrug of the shoulders, that he has neither the time nor the inclination to visit the West End, but his clothes look as if they came from a more fashionable district than dockland. Perhaps he sends his car to Savile Row and fetches the fitter, with patterns, to Limehouse. I can't say. And he is so modest about his poor house and his unworthy cigars that it is difficult to press him. Indeed, his self-effacement is such that he is visibly distressed by any but the most general of conversations.

CHAPTER XXIV

SAFFRON HILL

THE majority of the foreigners in our midst lead humdrum lives, and their habits and surroundings bear the unmistakable mark not indeed of England, but of Europe. They are hardly ever written up and even their whereabouts are unknown. In saying this I am not making conversation. The Londoners who are aware of the existence of the Italian Colony on Saffron Hill are, as far as my experience goes, in a minority. Most people have no notion where Saffron Hill lies and are convinced that all Italians live in Soho.



The slope known as Saffron Hill falls away from either side of the west end of the Clerkenwell Road ; and, lest that should make you no wiser, the Clerkenwell Road begins at the Holborn Town Hall, and plunges eastwards on its first task of joining Gray's Inn Road to Farringdon Street. In the fulfilment of this duty it divides Great Saffron Hill from Little Saffron Hill and bisects the quarter. "Little Italy" has now spread across Gray's Inn Road and along Theobald's Road. But for convenience

sake I propose to follow the usual custom of the neighbourhood and include this western extension under the comprehensive title of Saffron Hill. It is worth while to remark, in passing, that almost every foreign settlement in the metropolis shows a corresponding steady expansion. You would expect to find that, of the thousands drained away by the War, only a percentage had returned, and then with great difficulty, owing to the small mesh of the Labour Exchanges. But as London grows, the alien districts grow also, not merely in population, but in area. It is a many-sided problem of wages and skill, but there is one side surprisingly inconspicuous. The inter-marrying with native stock, so distressing to many good citizens in the New World, is here (I speak without figures) comparatively rare.

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The appearance of the inhabitants and the frequency of the eating-houses tend at first to remind the casual visitor of Soho. Life sprawls here, with a rather un-English abandon. But the external resemblance does not go very far. Saffron Hill makes no attempt to attract the more economical or sentimental members of the fashionable world. It doesn't want to exploit the semi-Bohemians; it seems to go out of its way to do nothing to draw them and as a result it is left in peace—the noisy chattering which Italians call peace. Here are no rows of restaur-

ants with open doors and dark-skinned waiters whom, on the whole, it is safer to address in English ; no one-and-ninepenny *dejeuner* and three-and-sixpenny *diner* with " Bonjour, monsieur, 'dame'" included, but with coffee extra. Thus, should you be sufficiently curious to take a walk to Saffron Hill, you will be wise to choose a fine day. Like Noah's dove, you will find no resting place, except the eating-houses, which you won't care for, and the public-houses, which are for the most part of no interest. Just because this is a genuine foreign quarter, it is extremely difficult to enter. You will hear occasionally the querulous voice of an old woman in a dark interior directing a rattle of abuse towards the street ; you can pick your way through swarms of children ugly as monkeys and beautiful as angels ; you can see dark girls with full, unfashionable figures lounging against door-posts. These and many other impressions you may receive, but you will not yourself make the faintest impression on the old women, the young women or the children. After loitering for half an hour and failing to arouse suspicion, curiosity or even the most casual glance, you will probably hurry off to Holborn or King's Cross in the hope that a bump from a passer-by will dispel your feeling of ghostliness.



Beneath an Italian sun the quarter might be shady and reposeful. Beneath a leaden sky it is

undeniably dirty, tumbledown and slack about appearances. In this respect it resembles most of the districts of London which have been appropriated by foreigners. I have often wondered why, in an age of reconstruction and "improvement," the alien quarters should have been left untouched, and I regret to have to add that my speculations have not provided me with a convincing answer. Perhaps our administrators think that charity should begin at home. Perhaps the foreigners, by keeping quiet, have got themselves left till the last. Perhaps they have actively, or rather passively, resisted all attempts to disturb them. Perhaps, again, the foreigners, more thrifty and less careful of appearance, cling to those districts which are central and yet comparatively cheap. I don't know. Just as simply and probably they may find that in the close, congested, narrow districts they can more easily keep themselves warm. It must be remembered, too, that as far as the Italians on Saffron Hill are concerned, most of them come from a pre-Fascist Italy, where they grew up in a country whose staple industry was picturesque dilapidation.

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It is a district through which an unobservant stranger might pass and, never noticing the Italian names above the shops and warehouses and the dark eyes of the inhabitants, think he was still in Cockneydom. Most of the social life

is carried on in small clubs, jealously guarded and full of the mystery dear to the Italian heart. A discreet but characteristic knock at a perfectly featureless door will admit you, if you are in the right company, to one or more of these nightly gatherings. Although there is a thrilling air of conspiracy about them all, most of them are perfectly harmless. There are, of course, certain notorious gangs who have, like the others, their meeting-places. But since even notorious gangs must have their moments of repose and negative virtue, and since the most upright of Italians has a way of looking to our eyes reckless and passionate, the clubs and their members vary but little in appearance. In one sense they are all or almost all lawless, in that they sell drinks after hours. In another sense they are law-abiding institutions, where the wine is good and cheap and the behaviour exemplary. Except for an occasional murder, which is dealt with by the police in the ordinary way, there is nothing for the most scrupulous to object to.



The usual passage leads to the usual large room at the back, crowded with Italians all talking with animation. They drink coffee or Chianti or what they will, and, unlike the members of a corresponding English gathering, they all remain keen, alert and amiable. There is a lot to be said for good wine, only this isn't the place to say it. I merely remark that the more

prosperous members can get first-class Mumm or Clicquot in these clubs for seven-and-six or eight shillings a bottle. Where it comes from, how it's managed, I haven't the faintest idea.

Waiters, tailors, musicians, organ grinders (whose instruments are or used to be tuned and tested and hired out locally), business men, workers in marble, wine merchants and artisans spend their evenings on equal terms in that atmosphere of Latin democracy which reveals England as a country still in the grip of feudalism. It is a gay and pleasant scene, and you would never guess that at the moment a shadow hangs over it. Yet so it is. The shadow of suspicion lies on Little Italy—or so Little Italy likes to think. You go there determined not to let a word escape your lips which could possibly be construed into a comment, favourable or otherwise, on the political condition of Italy ; and every member in turn will take you aside and warn you of the dangers of talking politics with anyone but him. Italian society, he will tell you, is full of Mussolini's spies (or full of Mussolini's enemies, as the case may be), and he warns you as a friend not to let that hatred of (or love for) Fascismo, which he has read in your eyes, lead you into talking politics with strangers. Be advised, he whispers darkly, and regard every man with suspicion until you have thoroughly proved him. So saying, he raises his glass, bows, and makes room for the next patriot to introduce himself and his identical counsel.

The advice is so kindly given that it seems ungenerous to look at it twice ; but before long it dawns on you that " spies " are members of other clubs and that you are always a solitary stranger among " patriots."

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My reluctance to talk politics in Little Italy is equalled only by my reluctance to talk politics outside it. But since there is one question which every reader of these lines will be sure to ask, it would be affectation to ignore it. The answer to that question, as far as my experience qualifies me to give one, is that the Italian residents in London are on the whole unfavourably disposed towards the regime existing in their fatherland. It is of course possible to argue that they include anti-Fascists who have been driven from their country as undesirables. I think it would be more honest to admit that a good many of the critics of the Government are men and women who have lived all their lives in England, as their parents did before them. It may be that they cling to a sentimentalised vision of an old Italy, a Verdi land which never properly existed. It may be, moreover, that they have learned from their residence in England to love, not only horse-racing, but liberty of speech as well. Whatever the explanation, I leave others to condemn or praise. I merely record the existence of growling, flashing discontent, of vague threats, of a general dissatisfaction which seems to

provide the utmost satisfaction to hundreds of eloquent exiles. Even an Englishman, when out of his own country, takes an interest in its affairs. A member of the Latin races, already by nature a politician, is convinced that absence from home requires him to redouble his mistrust of public methods. The fact that his family has lived for two or three generations in London only makes it all the more necessary for him to speak Italian in his home and to maintain with all his force the particular brand of patriotism in which his ancestors specialised. In short, he would be slightly ludicrous if he wasn't so magnificently in earnest. Beside him the ordinary Englishman, with his ineradicable habits of reasonableness and seeing both sides of a question, cuts a hesitating and colourless figure. Each has the defects of its qualities. I am sure that, contradictory though it may sound, our Empire is cemented as much by the gentle sympathy as by the energy of our race. I'm not forgetting that the Romans had a great Empire, too. But in the absence of very definite knowledge about the ordinary Roman colonist, I have an idea that he was an easy, peaceful sort of chap, not burdened with political theories, and not very like the Italian of to-day.

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I never heard of an Englishman keeping Empire Day in Rome, but the Italians on Saffron Hill religiously celebrate their festivals, and those

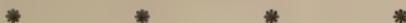
who enjoy a show should visit the quarter on one of these days. They are the only occasions when the residents display themselves. They can't live the sunny, open-air life in England because it is too cold ; and incidentally they have brought the cool indoor habit from Italy, where it is so hot. Quite early in the evening the streets wear a deserted look. The men are in their clubs, and of the occasional groups of young people, the female portion at least is usually English. You might, amid such unwonted quietness, imagine yourself in any provincial city of the continent. A mile away to the West the night (and, for some people, life) is only just beginning.

CHAPTER XXV

SEVEN DIALS

ONE night, after a long stretch of writing, I went out of doors, hungry for food and fresh air and the stimulus of the streets. It was about half-past ten, and the West End, looking as it usually does at that hour, provided a pleasant change from my own wearisome personality. I had half a mind to turn into Rupert Street, for I felt that, in my present mood, I might at last stumble on that cigar store kept by "the handsomest tobacconist in London." Instead, I found myself in Wardour Street, outside an imposing restaurant I hadn't entered for years. A faint curiosity as to its welfare, a vague idea that I had earned a little treat, checked my steps. The usual door admitted me ; yet there was, at once, something. . . . Before I could define any sensation, I saw a little yellow man smiling across the counter of the gentlemen's cloak room. His brilliant smile, his shining teeth, were exactly as one has seen them "registered" a hundred times by Japanese men-servants in American films. He took my coat and hat with the same delighted smile, and I turned to find his image reflecting a similar rapture in the middle of the entrance hall.

There was no mirror—merely this second small yellow man, silently and mysteriously present. Would I go up or down? A band was playing a Charleston as if it meant it, and I decided for downstairs. I was beginning to think there was something unusual about the place. In such circumstances, I always go downstairs. Nine times out of ten it pays.



There was another little smiler at the bottom of the stairs, and there, dressed in white ducks, was the band. I couldn't place the musicians exactly. At least, I felt positive that they came from the Malay States, but as I know nothing of that part of the world, my certainty was entirely unjustifiable. Anyhow, the band was a trifle; a greater novelty immediately drove it from my mind. I had not expected to find this charming room, in this well-regulated restaurant, barely two stone-throws from the Hub of the Empire, given over to coloured boys dancing with white girls. Seated in isolation at my table against the wall, I tried to concentrate on the menu and not to stare. I don't know if I was successful, but I discovered in a moment that I was the only white man present, and that I was an object of intense, though veiled, interest, and even mistrust. Every time I raised my eyes I was conscious not so much of encountering dark glances as of having just missed them. This,

and the conflicting emotions produced in me by the scene, made me determined to remain. Besides, I wanted to discover what I thought about it all. Hundreds of people have cut me out of their wills owing to my unsoundness on the colour problem. I stayed and watched ; and for the second time in half an hour I sighed for the wise counsel and balanced judgment of Prince Florizel of Bohemia.



The white girls, and the only half-caste in the room—an attractive little creature—took no more notice of me than if I had been a roll of bread. I was glad of this, because already doubts were beginning to assail me that I was behaving like a pig in spoiling the enjoyment of a number of people. My presence wasn't embarrassing the ladies, at any rate, or spoiling their evening. I fancy that several of them belonged to a "certain class." You, possibly, will be fancying that they must have been the most degraded of their sex. Nothing could be wider of the truth. They were extremely decorous, and even modest. I realised that they might be behaving nicely because the discipline of the place would necessarily be strict, or because their partners so obviously expected them to do so ; nevertheless, their good manners seemed to be natural and unforced. While I never reached the stage of thinking it desirable that all girls

should share their taste in dance partners, I certainly ended by wondering whether these might not be girls who, disgusted by the bald and spatted satyrs of the ordinary Soho night club, turned with immense relief to the shy, gentle Asiatics who held them so respectfully, steered them so lightly, and treated them like gracious ladies in the intervals. I found myself thinking that possibly self-respect, and not lack of it, had led some of these girls to their present surroundings.

The coffee-tinted waiter brought me an admirable omelette, and by dint of much "business" with knife and fork and cruet, I managed gradually to restore the confidence of the male clients and get myself forgotten. They were very young and apparently well-to-do ; their clothes were good, and the place is not cheap. They rivalled their partners in model deportment, and the sternest critic would have been forced to admit that they were inoffensive. Their chief characteristic was happiness—a most uncommon quality, as far as my experience goes, at supper dances. They radiated happiness. Oriental students, medical or legal, are apt to find life lonely in London, and these young men, I daresay, had every reason to feel happy. But who wants explanation ? I know that, if I were a girl, I should feel there was a good deal to be said in favour of such an appreciative escort. Very clearly, in that world, a young woman is something to be grateful for ; and this, perhaps, is

the reason why the girls were at their best. Even those who were not technically respectable were most respectable members of their class, and hardly to be distinguished from the land-ladies' daughters from Bloomsbury and the rest. The least minx-like, the least self-conscious, and, strangely, the most popular dancing partner of all, was the half-caste.

* * * *

Northwards, on the opposite edge of Soho, there is a restaurant with a similar *clientèle*; and eastwards, just over the Soho border, there are coloured folk again, but of a very different shade, build and nature. You will hardly take an evening walk round Seven Dials without encountering black men. More precisely, big buck niggers with American accents. You might find them in certain pubs, or, less easily, in certain cafés; you are almost sure to see them standing in bulky groups in certain streets. Best to leave them there and make your way home. If you hang about long enough observing them, you might discover the whereabouts of the two or three cafés they have made their own. But it is unwise to follow them in. They don't like strangers, and they're very big men.

I should never have got in—or rather, I should never have succeeded in remaining—if I hadn't been personally introduced by a pickpocket of my acquaintance. He is a Cockney, free of the

tar brush ; for it is not racial exclusiveness which makes the black men so shy. No ; there are other and more practical reasons, which I will give you presently. For the moment, it must be enough for you that they are extremely sensitive to the presence of strangers. It was nearly enough for me. We had barely pushed our way round the large men filling the floor and taken our obscure seats at a corner-table when I heard a meaning "Huh!" behind me. I didn't look round, but I saw my friend's face darken. I went on talking as easily as I could—it wasn't very easily—while the "Huhs!" grew louder and more frequent. The air was indescribably close, and seemed to be getting closer ; and the face of the little man opposite me grew more and more sullen. I could see he wasn't hearing a word I said, but I went on talking in a low voice. Suddenly he banged the table with his fist.

" You known me five years, 'aven chu?" he demanded fiercely, looking past me. " You know me by vis time, don' chu? If I bring in a pal, Joe, e's good enough fer you, ain't 'e? "

The foul air seemed to stand still in a thick silence. I heard a chair scrape ; a shadow fell across the table.

" Sure! " said a lovely, deep, rich voice, like Paul Robeson's ; and an enormous black hand, open, came over my shoulder. " Shake! "

It seemed to me one of those restful occasions when one doesn't have to make up one's mind. I shook ; and Joe, a huge man in an ill-chosen

Fair-Isle jumper, revealed a score of flawless teeth and declared that he was glad to meet me. He drew up a chair, and, to show his contrition at having doubted me, allowed me to order him a cup of tea. The stout *patronne* from the *Æ*gean Islands hastened to comply ; the general conversation, half roar, half shriek, crashed back again into gear, and everything was happy and comfortable again.

* * * *

Joe and his friends might be saxophonists or pugilists, and may even describe themselves as such. But they have nothing but their colour to substantiate the contention. They follow another profession, and it is this which makes them so shy of strangers, so sensitive to intrusion. They cling to the African tradition, and allow the other sex to support them. That was why from time to time a white woman, as a rule neither young nor old, would push open the street door with an air of quiet familiarity. Over a cup of tea she would whisper, long and earnestly, into a black ear ; then, beckoning to one of her trade sisters, drift out again. Thanks to Joe, who seemed to have taken quite a fancy to me, I met and actually chatted with an affable gentleman whose expenses were being defrayed by the exertions of no fewer than six of these self-appointed patronesses. Sartorially, at least, he did them credit.

. . . In the stifling heat, amid the dirt, the hubbub, and the smell, I heard again, in my mind's ear, the gentle tones of a philosopher who had once expounded to me the outlook of a man such as Joe. This particular parasite had been a Frenchman, not a nigger, and he had confessed, in a moment of detachment, that he had never expected to find himself following such a profession. In the beginning he had fallen deeply in love with a *trotteuse*. For a while he supported her till, his means proving insufficient, she had once more to fend for herself. Before long, she came to him in distress over a landlord, a client, or a gendarme. He arranged her little affair, but before long she sought him out again. Somebody else, presuming on the social helplessness of women of her type, had treated her badly. . . . Finally, in deference to her wish, and because he was still fond of her and hated to think of her defencelessness, he consented to act temporarily as her manager—I think that was the word—until he found regular employment again. The arrangement worked so well that it continued ; and when death or marriage removed her, several of her friends sought his services in a similar capacity. He had, it seemed, quite a *flair* for the work, and as everyone was satisfied . . .

I listened to Joe, noisily sipping his tea, and my thoughts wandered off again to Carmen's

lover. "Señor, a man becomes a rascal without thinking of it. A pretty girl steals your wits, you fight for her. . . ." But it was no good. I looked round the room, and I couldn't see anyone in the least like Don José—only one huge fellow with waisted grey overcoat and lavender spats, Joe in preposterous jumper, and the others, so flash, so noisy. Their outward confidence was tremendous. Pugnacity was the fashion ; but their everlasting loud squabbles, full of boastful threats, never led or looked like leading anywhere. There is, moreover, no pretence that any one of them sets the barrier of his muscles between the woman (or women) supporting him and the difficulties and dangers of her life. No. A guy wants to be careful. He don't want to do anything as will get him noticed. . . .

When, after renewed protestations of eternal friendship with Joe and the dandy coon in spats, we took our leave, the floor was filled with two mountains of muscle which stood, jaw to jaw, breathing defiance at one another. Of course, the niggers do fight. These two looked as if they must fight. But I knew they wouldn't.

We reached, after a suitable detour, the street door.

"And when ah lift mah foot, ah lift mah foot *good*."

Lazily, like the tones of an organ, the great voice rolled round the room. The pickpocket

pulled the door to behind us, and we stood on the pavement listening for the crash. It never came ; and my little friend, tugging me by the sleeve, led me away.

“ Well ? ” he said, jerking his head back in the direction of the café. “ All good citizens, I serpose? All loyal subjicks of King George? ”

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